



OSPREY AIRCRAFT OF THE ACES® • 99



Aces of the *Legion Condor*



Robert Forsyth

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THE GENTLEMEN FROM TETUÁN

In the late afternoon of 24 July 1936, a lone Ju 52/3m airliner operated by Lufthansa touched down at Gatow airfield on the outskirts of Berlin. The Junkers tri-motor had flown in from Tablada, near Seville in southern Spain, which it had left that morning, making intermediate stops at Marseilles and Stuttgart. In addition to its German crew, aboard the aircraft were three passengers – two Germans and one Spaniard.

The Germans were the businessman Johannes Bernhardt and mining engineer Adolf Langenheim, both resident in Tetuán, Spanish Morocco, and both dedicated members of the small, but active, Nazi Party contingent in that North African country. For the previous six years, Bernhardt, who had failed as an entrepreneur in Germany, had built up rewarding business contacts with the Spanish, his export company supplying the Spanish armed forces with communications equipment, cameras, stoves, range-finding devices and target equipment for the *Ejército de Africa* (Army of Africa). He also had close contacts within the right-wing Spanish officer cadre.

As *Ortsgruppenleiter Tetuán*, 60-year-old Langenheim was the nominal head of the local Nazi community in Tetuán, a part of the so-called *Auslandsorganisation* ('Foreign Organisation') and, as such, was in close contact with the German Embassy in Madrid, as well as with Gauleiter Ernst Wilhelm Bohle, the English-born head of the *Auslandsorganisation* in Berlin. In such a position of influence, Bohle, in turn, worked closely with the very highest levels of the Nazi Party, including both Adolf Hitler and Rudolf Hess.

Accompanying the two Germans on this extremely clandestine trip to Germany was the third passenger, Capitán ingeniero aeronáutico Francisco Arranz Monasterio. Arranz was travelling in his recently appointed role as the 'chief of staff' of a collection of units of the Spanish *Aviación Militar* (air force) that had taken sides with a clique of discontented, right-wing 'rebel' generals under the overall coordination of Gen Emilio Mola Vidal. For many months the latter had been secretly plotting action against the new, democratically constituted government of the Spanish Republic led by the leftist writer and intellectual, Manuel Azaña.

There had been nearly 150 years of social unrest and political turbulence in Spain. It had started as far back as 1808 when the Monarchy had collapsed and war had raged over the issue of a constitution. The Monarchy, regarded as corrupt, had been expelled by the Army in 1868, and there then followed years of class hatred, nationalism, rioting against the Church and strikes. By the early 1900s, Spain was divided into two mutually hostile social groups, with landowners and industrialists on one side and landless labourers on the other.

The advance of Socialism and anarchism among urban workers led the more far-sighted landowners to try to stop the spread of this to the countryside. Counter-revolutionary syndicates were financed by landlords from 1906, and in 1912 a group of dynamic social Catholics led by Angel Herrera helped establish a series of powerful Agrarian Federations. These right-wing organisations tried to improve the lives of impoverished farmers by offering them credit facilities, agricultural expertise, warehousing and machinery in return for their adoption of virulent anti-socialism.

Nevertheless left-wing urban unrest became so bad that in 1917 an insurrectionary army crushed the protest and Gen Miguel Primo de Rivera, Captain-General of Barcelona, was installed as a military dictator in 1923, having accused the parliamentary government of leading the country to ruin. King Alfonso XIII then entrusted the government to Primo de Rivera who, though arbitrary, was a dictator of some mildness and charm, and he outwardly restored order. A brief 'golden age' began, but the calm was superficial, however, and discontent steadily increased throughout Spain.

In January 1930 the King abruptly withdrew his support for Primo de Rivera. Alfonso then tried to return to the system of alternative moderate Liberal and Conservative governments, but these were unable to control the upsurge of left wing Republicanism. Liberal protests brought an end to the dictatorship in April 1931 – the year churches were burned in Madrid. Alfonso bowed to the result and left Spain.

Alcalá Zamora, an Andalusian, then became prime minister of a moderate but weak provisional government that was incapable of maintaining order. Riots broke out all over the country, during which churches and convents were burned and looted. In June 1931 a constituent parliament was elected, and the success of the Republican coalition was confirmed by the voters. Zamora was appointed president of Spain in December 1931, trying in vain to steer a middle course between the Left and Right.

For the following two years the country was governed by the Socialist majority led by Manuel Azaña. In August 1932 Gen José Sanjurjo Sacanell led a right wing military insurrection against this government, but it was crushed without difficulty.

In November 1933 the right won the general election, victory going to the CEDA or Catholic Party – effectively a right-wing Conservative, Catholic/Clerical, Monarchist and Carlist alliance – led by José Maria Gil Robles. Relying on the support of various right wing groups, the party was to trigger a revolution in October 1934 when Catalan Nationalists, Socialists and Asturian miners rose against it, giving a foretaste of what was to come. A temporary working-class dictatorship was established in Asturias, but the revolution was brutally suppressed and Azaña imprisoned.

Spanish politics was a see-saw of conflict and instability. Since the national elections of February 1936, which had been called by President Zamora in the hope that a centre party would at last emerge between the warring political extremes, Spain had been ruled by the *Frente Popular* (Popular Front). This was a coalition of anti-Fascist left-wing parties comprising various Republican, Socialist, Communist and Marxist

parties and factions supported by trade unions and anarchists that had won a decisive victory over the CEDA alliance.

A liberated Azaña had formed a new cabinet, which implemented a social reform programme involving the distribution of land, the development of schools and the start of an anti-clerical policy. However, the situation rapidly deteriorated. The state became powerless to deal with the violence of various antagonistic elements and had proved incapable of carrying out the necessary reforms. On 24 May, Francisco Largo Caballero, a trade unionist who sat on the left of the Socialist party and whom many saw as the 'Spanish Lenin', declared ominously, 'When the Popular Front breaks up, as break up it will, the triumph of the proletariat will be certain. We shall then implant the dictatorship of the proletariat, which does not mean the repression of the proletariat, but of the capitalist and *bourgeois* classes!'

This was too much for the politically conservative classes. They feared that their beloved country would disintegrate into a cluster of anarchic communes run on Communist principles, wide open for taking over by a foreign power, or, under the hands of the socialists, the opening of the door for Communism and control by Moscow.

Azaña had been elected president of the Spanish Republic on 10 May, replacing Alcalá Zamora. He recognised that victory for the Popular Front had meant that, with all the fiery and extreme rhetoric of the Left, sentiment in Conservative Spain was in danger of shifting from the politicians to the generals, who could promise – and effect – order amidst the chaos. That would be unacceptable and would have to be stopped. For their part, men like Sanjurjo and Mola knew this and had decided to act. The powder keg erupted on 13 July 1936 when a former Conservative minister and effectively leader of the right wing opposition, José Calvo Sotelo, was murdered two days after he was openly threatened by a Communist deputy. Enough was enough. In mid-July the 'rebels' went into action.

As many as seven leading generals were actively involved in the rebel uprising, and they were spread far and wide across Spain. Mola had been 'exiled' by a wary Azaña to the post of military governor of Pamplona in Navarre, but kept in contact with his fellow conspirators, Gens Fanjul, Villegas, Varela, Orgaz and Saliquet. But the figurehead, the portly monarchist Sanjurjo had been killed just four days earlier when his over-laden, tiny, two-seat de Havilland Puss Moth had crashed at Estoril as he was leaving his exile in Portugal to lead the military uprising and the hoped-for triumphant march into Madrid. In Africa, another general, 44-year-old Francisco Franco, who controlled elements of the colonial regular Spanish Army, the Spanish Foreign Legion and the Arab Moorish mercenaries of the *Regulares Indígenas*, had been monitoring the situation from a distance. The rebel generals knew that in the event of fighting during the course of the uprising, the support of Franco's battle-hardened *Ejército de Africa* would be vital.

In terms of territory, within a week of the uprising starting on 17 July, the rebels had achieved significant gains and controlled about a third of the country, including a large area encompassing Galicia, León, Old Castile, Aragón and part of Extremadura, along with isolated spots such as Oviedo, Seville and Cordoba. The plan was to strike at Madrid, the capital and the

Government troops of the *Guardias de Asalto* protecting the airfield at Getafe, on the outskirts of the Spanish capital Madrid, run past a Breguet 19 during the uprising by rebel generals in July 1936. The rebels had planned to strike at Madrid, the epicentre of Republicanism



centre of Republicanism. But there was still work to be done in the rebel camp, and there were two urgent matters to sort out – firstly, the structure of leadership. In terms of command, with the loss of Sanjurjo, it was Franco in Africa who, as a major-general, was the senior ranking officer over Mola – a brigadier-general – while Maj-Gen Gonzalo Queipo de Llano y Serra, although senior to Franco and recently joined to the rebel cause, was found to be unacceptable to many rebel officers because of his Republican connections. Thus it was that within a week of the uprising many overseas governments were referring to the rebels as ‘Francoists’.

Secondly, support – in the form of badly needed military equipment such as guns, ammunition, aircraft and even men – from potentially sympathetic governments abroad was required. The rebels had already approached Fascist Italy, the monarchist journalist Luis Bolín having journeyed to Rome on 19 July to ask Mussolini for transport aircraft to assist the cause, while Franco was in contact with the Italian Consul in Tangier.

At first the rebels’ requests were brushed aside, Mussolini simply scribbling ‘NO’ at the bottom of a telegram from Franco requesting 12 bombers or civilian transports, while on another the dictator remarked dismissively, ‘FILE’. However, as the telegrams from Tangier streamed in, and Russian support of the Left appeared unlikely, Mussolini’s interest in the developments in Spain grew, especially when Franco offered the flattering promise to emulate Italian Fascism in his country. Ultimately, during the evening of 27 July, arrangements were made for the despatch of 12 SIAI S.81 bombers of the *Regia Aeronautica*. They were to be assembled at Elmas military aerodrome near Cagliari, in Sardinia, prior to being flown to Spain. For the rebels, it was a promising start.

Meanwhile in Germany, the Nazi volunteer ‘emissaries’ of the rebel movement, Bernhardt and Langenheim, accompanied by Capitán Arranz, were somewhat disappointed to find themselves being treated as low-profile guests of Lufthansa rather than being welcomed as important delegates of a politically friendly aspirant regime. Indeed, the German Foreign Office was of the view that the group should not be received officially by either any German political authority or any military department, and that the possibility of shipping arms to Spain was out of the question.

The Foreign Office remained concerned by developments in Spain. There had been spasmodic attacks on German citizens by Communists and anarchists which prompted a pair of warships to be despatched to Spanish coastal waters. There were fears that the new leftist government

would pave the way for further Communist take-over, following on from the victory of the left-wing Popular Front in France earlier that year. Under authority from Constantin *Freiherr* von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, a representative from the Foreign Office telephoned Bohle and advised him, bluntly, of the official view.

For his part, the more worldly, South African-educated, Bohle elected to ignore the Foreign Office's instructions. The telegrams reaching his *Auslandsorganisation* from Spain portrayed a situation of intrigue and urgency from which, presumably, he felt Germany could benefit in some way. The power of the Party would now eclipse that of Government apparatus. From Berlin, Bohle telephoned Thuringia, where the deputy *Führer*, Rudolf Hess, was attending to local Party business. Bohle informed Hess of the arrival of the delegation from North Africa, as well as its objectives and requirements. Hess immediately instructed Bohle to arrange to fly Bernhardt and Langenheim to Thuringia so that he could meet them and listen to their requests. Leaving Arranz in Berlin for some reason, Bernhardt and Langenheim left at once in Hess' personal aircraft and arrived in Thuringia hours later.

Hess proved to be receptive, sympathetic – and decisive. He called Hitler in Bayreuth. The *Führer* was attending the annual Wagner music festival there as a guest of the Wagner family and staying at the Villa Wahnfried, the family residence. Quickly, Hess was able to bring Hitler to the telephone, whereupon he prevailed to the *Führer* to meet with the men from Tetuán. Hitler agreed, and Hess next called Bohle and ordered him to Bayreuth, and to bring other senior Party officials with him, including the head of legal affairs within the *Auslandsorganisation*.

Finally, late in the evening of the following day, 25 July, as Hitler returned to the Villa Wahnfried buoyed from a performance of *Siegfried* conducted by his favourite conductor, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Bernhardt and Langenheim, in the company of a senior official from the *Auslandsorganisation*, were brought before him.

Hitler was well briefed. He knew from information received from the embassy in Madrid that morning that there was a prospect of a long civil war in Spain, but also that the rebels' position was, in reality, tenuous. His ambassador to Spain had already warned of the 'the Bolshevik danger' and had suggested increasing German espionage activities against the more radical elements in Spanish society. Hitler went as far as sending Abwehr agents disguised as businessmen to Spanish cities to monitor Communist and anarchist activity. A Republican victory in any war would have grave ramifications for German interests, with the unpalatable prospect of a Spanish soviet regime neighbouring France, which already held an alliance with Russia. Furthermore, Hermann Göring had outlined to Hitler the potential longer-term economic benefits to be gained by supporting a victorious Franco.

Bernhardt presented a 'terse' letter from Franco in which the general asked for rifles, anti-aircraft guns, fighters and transport aircraft. Hitler was sceptical and enquired as to the financial situation of the rebels, to which Bernhardt smoothly moved on to the rich quantities of raw materials available in Andalusia that could willingly be placed at the disposal of the Reich in exchange for aircraft and armaments. The *Führer* remained hesitant. 'That's no way to start a war', Hitler is supposed to

have commented, and pressed his visitors for more finite information. Bernhardt ruefully admitted that any war could last many months, but if Franco did not receive immediate help the situation could be catastrophic. 'Then he is lost', Hitler remarked.

Then, however, forgetting his planned supper, the *Führer* launched into a two-hour diatribe about Spain and the threat Europe faced from Bolshevism. Bernhardt, Langenheim and the other guests in the room maintained a patient silence. In doing this, Hitler seemed to convince himself that the spectre of Germany being flanked to the east and west by Bolshevik blocs was something so hideous as not to be contemplated. Stirred by the powerful emotions of *Siegfried*, Hitler rallied to the ideology of brave Spanish nationalism engaged in a struggle against a tide of Bolshevism. Hitler made up his mind; the rebels would receive support.

Under the codename *Unternehmen Feuerzauber* (Operation *Magic Fire*), born of Wagner's heroic music accompanying Siegfried's passage through the ring of flames to free Brünnhilde, Hitler authorised aid to be shipped as soon as possible. He summoned both Göring and Generalfeldmarschall Werner von Blomberg (Minister of Defence and Supreme Commander of the German armed forces, who was also in Bayreuth) to the villa, as well as his personal guest to the music festival, his ambassador to London, Joachim von Ribbentrop.

Despite his earlier enthusiasm for becoming involved with Spain, initially Göring was aghast at the prospect of military intervention and the likelihood of ensuing international complications. Faced with a resolute *Führer*, however, he demurred no further. Blomberg did not object, although the vain and humourless von Ribbentrop warned Hitler weakly to stay out of Spain, claiming that there were 'no laurels to be gained' and only a risk of raising a negative reaction from England. But Hitler cut von Ribbentrop off, responding resolutely that Spain's prime minister was Communist and that his weapons came from Moscow. The matter was closed – the time for debate over. The rebels had won a powerful new donor.

Now the practicalities moved swiftly ahead. It was nearly 0200 hrs on 26 July – a Sunday – but this did stop Hitler's desire for action. Just a few hours later, the German naval commander in Hamburg was ordered to fly south in Hitler's aircraft, together with the Secretary of State for Aviation, the ambitious and very efficient, General der Flieger Erhard Milch. The two men were in Bayreuth by early afternoon, and within two hours the details of the plans for German military aid for Franco were hatched.

Back at his office in the *Reichsluftministerium* (RLM) in Berlin that evening, Milch, under instruction from Göring, called a meeting with Generalleutnant Albert Kesselring, who acted as senior Luftwaffe liaison to the staff of the Chief of the Army, Generalmajor Hans-Jürgen Stumpff, head of the Luftwaffe personnel office, and Generalleutnant Helmuth Wilberg, commander of a Luftwaffe *Lufikreisschule* (a main leadership and war academy). Wilberg, a native of the German capital, had obtained his pilot's licence in 1910 and taken part in some of the nation's earliest air races. During World War I he had gained a reputation as a very competent air staff officer, commanding more than 500 aircraft of the *Lufstreitkräfte* on the Flanders front in 1917. Wilberg had entered



Generalleutnant Helmuth Wilberg (seen here as a General der Flieger) had obtained his pilot's licence in 1910 and taken part in some of Germany's earliest air races. He had served German military aviation since 1913, and during World War 1 he had gained a reputation as a very competent air staff officer, commanding more than 500 aircraft of the *Luftstreitkräfte* on the Flanders front in 1917. He entered the new Luftwaffe in October 1934 and rose quickly to become a departmental director in the RLM and commander of Luftwaffe leadership schools. He was then assigned as head of *Sonderstab W*, the special staff formed under the instruction of General der Flieger Erhard Milch to oversee German operations in Spain

the new Luftwaffe in October 1934 and rose quickly to become a departmental director in the RLM. Curiously, he shared Jewish ancestry with Milch.

Milch briefed an astonished Wilberg and his fellow generals fully on *Magic Fire*. 'You all know the Spaniards, under the leadership of Gen Franco, have risen to liberate Spain. The greater part of Spain is in the hands of the enemy. Franco has asked the *Führer* to put at his disposal a fleet of Ju 52/3ms and crews to take his forces from Tetuán to Seville. General Göring has decided to entrust General Wilberg with this task'.

Milch instructed Wilberg to establish, with 'full powers', a new, highly covert 'Special Staff' to be known as *Sonderstab W* after its leader. Milch emphasised that at this stage secrecy and speed were paramount. Apart from his Chief of Staff, Major Ernst Jaenecke, even Wilberg's staff were not to be informed of the ultimate destination and objective of the *matériel* to be assembled.

As Wilberg and Jaenecke began to set about their work, Johannes Bernhardt, Adolf Langenheim and Capitán Arranz returned to Tetuán aboard the Ju 52/3m in which they had come. After a ten-hour flight over Switzerland and the coasts of France, Italy and Spain in an aircraft that had had all of its surplus items off-loaded in order to carry the maximum fuel load, the delegates arrived back in Morocco at around 1300 hrs on 28 July. They were greeted by a crowd of eager and anxious Spanish officers. Hardly had Arranz managed to put his feet on the ground than he was being pressed for details of Hitler's response to the rebel plea. Happily, Arranz was able to inform the officers that help was on its way in the form of military technicians, 20 pieces of artillery, ammunition, 20 Ju 52/3m transports and six Heinkel He 51 fighters.

In Germany, events moved quickly. The day after the meeting between Milch and Wilberg, on 27 July 1936, the pilots of the Luftwaffe's fighter units, the He 51-equipped I./JG 132 '*Richthofen*' at Döberitz and the Ar 65- and Ar 68-equipped I./JG 134 '*Horst Wessel*' at Dortmund, received an appeal for 'volunteers' to join a mysterious expeditionary force destined for an unidentified foreign country. In some cases, however, word seems to have 'got out', as in the case of Oberleutnant Hannes Trautloft. Trautloft was actually serving with 9. *Staffel* of I./JG 134's sister II. *Gruppe*, which had located to Köln-Butzweilerhof following the occupation of the Rhineland. He recalled;

'On 28 July 1936, whilst serving as an oberleutnant with 9./JG 134 at Köln, I received a telephone call from my *Kommandeur*, Hauptmann Horst Dinort. His first question was "Are you engaged to be married?" I stated that I was not. He then swore me to secrecy and began to explain to me about the situation in Spain and the need for well trained pilots in that country. Before he even had the chance to ask me if I would be prepared to go there, I said to him "I volunteer!"

'Dinort then told me to get ready to travel to Dortmund within the next two hours, where I would receive orders directly from a *Geschwaderkommodore*. He also ordered me to maintain absolute discretion about the whole thing, for it would not be easy to explain to my comrades what I was doing when they saw me hurriedly packing my bags!'

Trautloft was not alone. At other locations, five more 'voluntarily selected' fighter pilots were packing their bags and embarking on their

journey to an assembly point at an army barracks at Döberitz, not far from Berlin, on the first leg of their passage to Spain. Meanwhile, mechanics and engineers of the Junkers aircraft firm at Dessau, south of Hamburg, on the River Elbe, received orders to take in ten Ju 52/3ms from Lufthansa and six He 51s for immediate disassembly and packing for shipment by sea. Without asking questions, the workforce did as they were told, packing each deconstructed aircraft into strong, nondescript and unmarked wooden crates, having also removed all the national markings from each machine. Within 24 hours the crates had been delivered to Hamburg.

That same day, a complement of just over 90 volunteers arrived at the Döberitz assembly point – 25 officers and 66 NCOs, soldiers and civilian technicians and specialists. Here, the men were placed under the command of Oberst Alexander von Scheele, a highly experienced airman who had flown in a *Schlachtstaffel* in World War 1, and who spoke several languages having lived for a number of years in Latin America prior to being recalled to duty. Even ‘Papa’ Scheele believed at this time that *Magic Fire* was no more than a large-scale training and transport mission.

However, the volunteers were required to hand in their uniforms since, as of that day, they were officially discharged from the armed forces. In exchange, they received civilian clothing, cheap, identical suitcases for their belongings, new forms of identification as engineers, salesmen, artists and photographers, all ‘tourist’ members of the *Reisegesellschaft Union* (Union Travel Association) and the equivalent of 200 Marks in Spanish currency. A special mailbox was set up in Berlin under the name of one ‘Max Winkler’ to where relatives could write – and they too had been sworn to secrecy.

Accompanying Trautloft as fellow fighter pilots were Oberleutnant Herwig Knüppel and Leutnant Otto-Heinrich *Freiherr* von Houwald, both also from III./JG 134, and Oberleutnant Kraft Eberhardt, Leutnant Gerhard Klein and Leutnant Ekkehard Hefter. During a farewell inspection along with the rest of the group by Milch and Wilberg, they were told not to enter combat under any circumstances at their eventual destination – the role of the Heinkel pilots would be purely to protect and defend the Junkers transports that would be ferrying troops. This small team next travelled by bus to a railway station in Berlin and then on to Hamburg by train. At the Petersen Dock in Hamburg, the pilots and other personnel of the volunteer group boarded the Woerman Line cargo vessel SS *Usaramo*, onto which they assisted with the loading of 773 crates of equipment. According to Trautloft, ‘I would quickly learn that our aircraft were stowed in disassembled components’.

Around midnight on 31 July, the *Usaramo* sailed from Hamburg bound for Cádiz, in southern Spain. The ship arrived in Spanish waters on 6 August, where it anchored, before docking in Cádiz early the following day. The six German fighter pilots disembarked and, along with von Scheele and other volunteers, were put on a specially requisitioned train to Seville – a city that had been captured by the rebel Maj-Gen Queipo de Llano, and where accommodation had been arranged for German officers at the Cristina Hotel on the Jardines de Cristina. Ground personnel were quartered in local pensions, while the Heinkel mechanics, under the supervision of a senior Junkers foreman,

Oberst Alexander von Scheele had flown in a *Schlachtstaffel* during World War 1 before emigrating to South America. Recalled to Germany in the early 1930s, his ability to speak several languages helped him in his duties in coordinating the transport of German volunteer airmen to Spain



Newly arrived in Spain and still wearing civilian clothes, the initial cadre of six German fighter pilots pose for a snapshot against a newly assembled He 51B. They are, from left to right, Leutnant Gerhard Klein, Leutnant Ekkehard Hefter, Oberleutnant Hannes Trautloft, Oberleutnant Kraft Eberhardt, Oberleutnant Herwig Knüppel and Leutnant Wolf-Heinrich von Houwald. Evidently, an essential piece of personal kit was a sun hat, three of which can be seen resting on the wing bracing behind Klein!



Herr Winckler (known as 'Nurmi'), were sent straight to Tablada airfield. Hannes Trautloft recalled;

'The next morning we found ourselves at Seville airfield, a frequent target for "Red" airmen. On 9 August we started the job of rebuilding our six He 51s – a real piece of teamwork involving pilots and ground personnel. The Spanish personnel were quite surprised to witness us work with such energy, but we really were getting quite impatient and wanted to get our machines into the air as soon as possible.'

Conditions at Tablada were rudimentary. There was a poorly-equipped workshop that Winckler and his mechanics did their best to turn into something effective and efficient, and there was little shade from the baking Spanish sun for either man or machine. Herwig Knüppel recorded of this initial period;

'Our single-seaters had to be put together rapidly, as we wanted to strike out as soon as possible to the Front. Breaking open crates, raising aircraft fuselages, attaching wings, fixing bracing struts – that was our first occupation. In doing so, we established friendships with the Spanish pilots (Joaquín García) Morato, Julio (Salvador), (Luis) Rambaud and others, and with the Spanish mechanics. Many beads of sweat flowed.'

This account understates the level of friction that existed at the time. For example, von Houwald had grown irritated at the continual observation with which the eager Spaniards were monitoring progress on the re-assembly of the fighters, as well as their endless questions about the type which was superior to the licence-built Nieuport Ni-H.52s that equipped the *Aviación Militar*. However, as early as 10 August the first He 51 was fully assembled and ready for operations.

The He 51 was one of the Luftwaffe's principal fighter types of the mid- to late 1930s (the others being the Ar 65 and Ar 68). It had evolved from the He 49, the first design by the future eminent brother-partnership of Siegfried and Walter Günter. Having first flown in November 1932, the aircraft was

Oberleutnant Hannes Trautloft (left) and a fellow pilot enjoy the Spanish sun during a moment of rest at Tablada in the summer of 1936. Their clean-looking white overalls suggest that they have been working on the assembly of their aeroplanes



manufactured by the Germans deliberately as a 'trainer' and 'sports aircraft'. However, a close inspection of the sleek, nimble little aeroplane would have fooled few as to its real purpose – that of a preliminary fighter. Tests with the He 49a, b and c variants proved satisfactory, and the RLM authorised further development in the shape of the He 51.

Powered by a 750 hp BMW VI 12-cylinder liquid-cooled engine driving a two-blade propeller, the He 51 took the form of a single-seat, unequal-span biplane, constructed mainly of a metal frame covered in fabric, with a splayed, wire-braced undercarriage. The He 51A prototype was flight-tested in the summer of 1933, and the first pre-production model, the He 51A-0, was completed as a 'sports machine' and flew later that year, followed by the first series production machine, the A-1. Armed with two 7.9 mm MG 17 machine guns faired in over the engine and firing through the propeller, the Heinkel was delivered to the 'first' fighter *Gruppe* of the new Luftwaffe, I./JG 132, in the spring of 1934, with 75 such examples following to this unit, and others, by April 1935. An enhanced variant, the B-0, was produced from January 1936, but only 12 machines were built before the main B-1 series arrived and became the main fighter for the Luftwaffe by the summer of that year.

By July 1938, the He 51 had equipped, either fully or partially, some six *Jagdgeschwader* – JG 132, JG 135, *Küstenjagdstaffel* and I./JG 136, JG 137, JG 232, and JG 234. Although, in terms of design, the aircraft was a blend of grace and robustness, and despite at least one Luftwaffe pilot, Hennig Strümpell, describing it as 'the best fighter of the time', it was nevertheless a difficult aircraft to master and, with its already outdated engine, proved troublesome to maintain, even in peaceful conditions. It remained to be seen how this aircraft, incorporating a design redolent of an era already passed, and with its light armament and relatively short range (necessarily augmented by a 170-litre drop tank from 550 km to 740 km), would fare in true operational conditions.

In Spain, all He 51s used by what would become the *Legion Condor*, were assigned the type identification number '2' which was applied, in black, as the first number of the fuselage code.

German mechanics in their familiar black overalls gather for a photograph in the shade cast by the wings and engine compartment of a He 51B-1 in Spain. The Heinkel was powered by a 750 hp BMW VI 12-cylinder liquid-cooled engine



A Spanish officer uses the novelty of one of the first batch of six He 51Bs to be shipped to Spain, coded 2-2, as the backdrop for this photograph, probably taken at Tablada in the summer of 1936



Within just four days the German pilots at Tablada were able to put on a display patrol to both test the re-assembled Heinkels and to impress their Spanish comrades with the performance of their aircraft. In accordance with the instructions from Milch and Wilberg, the Germans were not authorised to enter combat, and so the first few days were spent training five rebel Spaniards selected from the first group of 18 fighter pilots to join the Nationalist side – Capitán Rambdaud and Morato and Teniente Miguel García Pardo, Ramiro Pascual and Julio Salvador.

On 18 August, while conducting solitary patrols, Morato claimed the destruction of three Republican aircraft. This was an encouraging start for the Heinkel, but problems were encountered by the Spaniards when bringing the aircraft in to land. The fighter had a tendency to bounce and veer once on the ground, and two He 51s were soon damaged, including one that suffered a broken propeller for which there was no replacement. Later, von Scheele was gratified to learn that his resourceful mechanics had repaired the propeller using what was on hand at Tablada, and the aircraft was ready for operations once again.

Impatient to contribute, the German pilots requested that they be allowed to engage in combat operations, and this permission was granted

He 51B 2-4, from the first consignment of Heinkels to go to Spain, is seen at Escalona del Prado, from where on 30 August 1936 Hannes Trautloft was shot down flying in his tennis clothes! Behind the Heinkel is a Fokker F VII tri-motor transport employed by the Nationalist air arm



by Gen Alfredo Kindelán y Duany, the commander of what was now viewed as the 'Nationalist' air forces. Of this time Knüppel recorded;

'After some seven days of strenuous work, with our toothbrushes and shaving gear stashed in the stowage compartment of our He 51s, we flew via Salamanca and the Sierra de Gredos to our small combat airfield of Escalona del Prado, near Segovia.

'There, on the northern perimeter of the Guadarrama hills, we were located together with an *Escuadrilla de reconocimiento* (reconnaissance squadron), with whom we soon established a warm friendship. The aircraft stood in the open, replacement parts, ammunition and fuel and oil laying protected from the sun under tarpaulins at the edge of the forest. We ourselves likewise lay to some extent protected from the full glare of the sun and slept when we were not flying, or else had language tuition with the Spanish crews.'

Von Houwald also recorded his observations of early conditions in Spain;

'We arrived at Salamanca, the second stopping place on our way to Escalona – a small town close to the Madrid Front. Salamanca was the first combat airfield I saw. We took a big chance in actually finding it because everything, including the aircraft, was very well camouflaged. We refuelled and took off for Escalona, an airfield that we heard was incredibly small and hard to find. It lay so close to the front that it was quite probable that we would engage the enemy. Nevertheless, we found it after half-an-hour and landed. The airfield was so poor that we were worried whether our Spanish comrades would be able to fly our aircraft from there.'

Von Houwald, who was already irked by some of the Spanish ways, found it galling that the German pilots were being forced to give over their aircraft for the Spanish to fly; as he recalled;

'Next day I had a most annoying experience. Full of enthusiasm and idealism, five Spaniards proudly climbed into our aircraft. They did not want foreigners to fight for them while they had to stay on the ground

Spanish mechanics attend to the first batch of He 51s of the German *Jagdstaffel* while at a refuelling stopover at Salamanca en route for Escalona del Prado in August 1936. For the German pilots, it was the first combat airfield they had seen





Not long after arriving in Spain two of the German *Jagdstaffel's* He 51Bs were damaged in landing accidents on 23 August 1936 while being flown by Spanish pilots Capitán Luis Rambaud and Teniente Ramiro Pascual of the *Escuadrilla Rambaud* at Escalona del Prado. Such recurring damage was a source of increasing frustration to the German pilots, whose few aircraft were then necessarily withdrawn from service for repairs

with nothing to do. But as they returned, my aircraft crashed on landing. Fortunately, the other Heinkels managed to land safely. From now on, without an aircraft, I had to stay on the ground while the others each shot down two or three enemy in short order. I had nothing better to do than to wait for new aircraft to come from home. I kept thinking that they would arrive too late because the “*Rojos*” would be forced to surrender in front of Franco’s massive offensive.’

The small cadre of Spanish pilots working with the Germans had formed themselves loosely into what they called the *Escuadrilla Rambaud*. This squadron’s first action took place on 23 August when three He 51s escorted Spanish-flown Ju 52/3ms sent to attack Getafe airfield on the southern outskirts of Madrid. It had been intended that the Spanish pilots fly some of the newly-arrived Fiat CR.32s that were due in Spain at any moment from Italy, but these had been delayed. In view of the depth of penetration of enemy airspace, it was decided that the Heinkels should be used instead. Furthermore, at this early stage of the conflict it was considered to be too risky to send German airmen flying over the Spanish capital.

Under a strong midday sun, and despite dense anti-aircraft fire over the capital, the mission was a success. Upon returning home, Rambaud’s He 51 – which had received a hit in the undercarriage – and Pascual’s fighter were damaged on landing on the short runway at Escalona, 40 km southwest of Madrid. With a sense of increasing frustration, the German contingent demanded of Kindelán that they, and they only, should be allowed to fly the Heinkels. Reluctantly, the general agreed, and the *Escuadrilla Rambaud* was disbanded at the end of the month. After a speedy, but testing, preparatory phase, the way was now clear for the German pilots to fly their He 51s in action over Spain for the first time.

THE JÄGER FROM GUADARRAMA

A way from Tablada and Escalona del Prado, German military aid was proving crucial to the success of the Nationalist war effort. The first ten Ju 52/3ms donated to Franco had arrived in Spanish Morocco, and they were put to immediate use ferrying badly needed troops and ammunition from the *Ejército de Africa* over the Straits of Gibraltar to the mainland. Their presence greatly accelerated what became known as the *punte aéreo* – the first large-scale ‘airbridge’ or airlift in history. Between 29 July and 5 August, these aircraft flew 1500 men, including six assault battalions, from Morocco to Seville, and in all 10,500 men were transferred to Spain from North Africa in July and August 1936, followed by 9700 in September.

By its conclusion on 11 October, the airlift had transported just under 14,000 troops and some 500 tons of materiel, including 36 artillery pieces. Historians have taken the view that, in truth, the airlift saved the Nationalist cause in the summer of 1936. Indeed, in 1942, Hitler declared that ‘Franco ought to erect a monument to the glory of the Junkers 52’.

In fact, Hitler had sent the Junkers tri-motors to Franco not only because they were needed to transport troops to the mainland, but also because Franco’s position in North Africa was easier to reach than

‘Franco ought to erect a monument to the glory of the Junkers 52’ – so commented Adolf Hitler in 1942, three years after the Spanish Civil War. Certainly, the Ju 52/3m transport played a crucial role in ferrying thousands of troops – such as the *Morros* of the Spanish Foreign Legion, seen here waiting to board flights that would take them from Africa to the Spanish mainland to fight for the Nationalist cause



Gen Mola's *Ejército Nacional del Norte* (Army of the North), based at Burgos, which was suffering from a dire shortage of ammunition – which Franco could replenish. By August 1936 Spain was broadly cut in two, with Mola controlling much of the north from Pamplona and Saragossa in the east, over to León, Lugo and La Coruña in the northwest (excepting the Basque coastal area and hinterland around Gijón, Santander and Bilbao), to Teruel, Segovia and Cáceres in the south, while Franco was gaining territory by advancing from the south and pushing on towards Córdoba. The rest of Spain, bar a few isolated Nationalist strongholds, was Republican.

The Nationalist goal was Madrid, symbolic, but held firmly by the Republicans. If Madrid could be taken, the Republican infrastructure would splinter and eventually collapse. To do this, Franco, with his forces now 'on the ground', intended to march his Legionnaires and *Regulares* north from Seville to Mérida and connect with Mola, before clearing Badajoz of enemy forces and establishing a link with Portugal, through which supplies would be brought. Following that, the way would be open for an advance on Madrid. Republican and Nationalist forces had clashed seriously for the first time in the south on 5 August at Almendralejo, resulting in the Nationalist advance being halted and then coming under attack by Republican aircraft.

However, the Republicans suffered from heavy casualties, as well as desertions, and fell back, allowing Franco's forces to resume their march and eventually hook up with Mola just north of Mérida, where the badly needed ammunition was handed over. The general eastward advance on Madrid along the valley of the Tajo resumed on the 20th under the overall command of Col Blanco Yagüe, a veteran of the Rif War.

In the air, the German fighter pilots made their debut on the afternoon of 25 August in support of the drive on Madrid. It would be an impressive opening. A patrol comprising Eberhardt – now in nominal command of the German fighter force – Trautloft and Knüppel, took off. The Spanish heat made conditions somewhat unusual for aerial combat, and as Trautloft recorded 'I sat in my aircraft in shorts and a T-shirt – my tennis clothes!' Knüppel also recalled;

'It was once again a sunny day with a clear blue sky. Catalonia lay beneath us, with its superb Guadarrama forested hills, on whose heights battles were being fought on the Puerto de Somosierra, Navicicera and on the pass road from León. In the northwest, beyond the hills, lay Segovia, and in the southwest, the mighty rectangle of the Escorial, with its imposing walls, domes and towers, while in the south, in the haze of the summer day, Madrid. We were flying on our way to the west. Suddenly, Oberleutnant Eberhardt gave the signal for attack.'

Eberhardt had spotted three 'Red' Breguet 19s about two kilometres away over the outskirts of Madrid, flying towards, and about 500 metres below, the Heinkels. With his hands 'shaking from excitement', Trautloft switched on his gunsight, entered into a dive from the sun, closed to within 30 metres and opened fire with his MG 17s;

'As I approach I see the gunner aiming his gun at me and then the muzzle lights up as he opens fire. It all looks rather harmless. With my first burst, the gunner disappears – his machine gun points vertically towards the sky. The "Red" now pushes over into a steep dive. My second

burst is brief, but on target, because all of a sudden the Breguet rears up, rolls over, roars towards the earth in a steep, uncontrolled dive and smashes into the ground north of the village of Comenar.’

Trautloft had scored what is believed to be the first aerial victory by German forces in Spain, but Knüppel was forced to break off his attack when his guns jammed. When the Heinkels landed back at Escalona del Prado, Eberhardt and Trautloft each lodged a claim for a Breguet shot down, and celebrated the occasion wildly with their mechanics. But Knüppel was to find redemption the next day in a second mission to Madrid;

‘Now, full power and attack! I head for one of the enemy *Aufklärer*, a Breguet 19. I have him in my cross-wires and open fire. He dives away beneath me. I make yet another attack – his engine stops and his observer stops firing. He crashes close behind the enemy line. In my great joy over this aerial victory, I perform a loop. But already an enemy fighter, a French parasol monoplane, is sitting on my tail. Just as I was about to turn onto him, he shot upwards. I was unfortunately unable to catch him, as his aircraft climbed better and was faster.’

The two-seat Breguet 19 sesquiplane would become a regular opponent for the Germans in the early days of operations over Madrid, but the Heinkel enjoyed outright superiority. Built by Construcciones Aeronáuticas S.A. (CASA), at Getafe, and formed of a mainly fabric-covered metal airframe with corrugated metal skinning around the forward fuselage and cockpit areas, the reconnaissance and light bomber had first appeared in 1921, and quickly gained a reputation for being one of the most versatile aircraft of the time. It gained fame for several notable long-distance flights during the late 1920s and during the Spanish Civil War served with the air forces of both sides. Armament consisted of a pair of machine guns mounted on a Scarff ring fitted to the observer’s position, although there was an option for a fixed, forward-firing machine gun mounted above the engine and, occasionally, another gun firing through a hatch in the fuselage floor.

In July 1936 there were about 60 or 70 Breguets on Republican strength. The following month, a number of them were moved south to Andújar and Herrera del Duque to provide air cover to the Republican units retreating from Franco’s columns advancing on Madrid.

On 27 August, Knüppel accounted for a Ni-H.52, possibly from the Republican *Grupo No 11* at Getafe, for his second victory. This licence-built single-seat biplane fighter made by Nieuport Hispano in Guadalajara and powered by a 500 hp Hispano-Suiza 12Hb 12-cylinder Vee-type engine proved problematic, as its cumbersome and narrow undercarriage made the aircraft susceptible to ground-looping. Armed with two Vickers 7.69 mm machine guns, the Nieuport was completely outclassed by the He 51.

Usually, a He 51 pilot would commence his attack on an enemy aircraft (usually a Ni-H.52 or Breguet 19) by diving from out of the sun and following through with a series of individual turning engagements. However, on 29 and 30 August, over the Sierra Guadarrama, the Germans engaged the Republicans’ big, lumbering, twin-engined French Potez 540 bombers for the first time. These aircraft had arrived at El Prat de Llobregat, in Barcelona, in early August, where they equipped the



international *Escadre España*. The German pilots soon found that their tried and tested tactics did not work so well against the big bombers.

During their first pass, Trautloft and Knüppel had their windscreens smeared with oil from a shot-up Potez, forcing them to break off their attacks. They were also set upon by a Dewoitine D.372 fighter. In another attack against the Potez bombers the next day deep over enemy territory, Trautloft angrily expended almost all of his ammunition from just 50 metres away and behind. In response, the bomber simply went into a steep glide, again spraying oil all over the German's windscreen and severely limiting his ability to see anything. Eberhardt and Knüppel were similarly frustrated. Lessons were being learned, for as Trautloft noted, 'From this range we can't possibly have missed. We suspect that the pilot's seat in the Potez bomber is armoured. Therefore in future we shall have to attack from in front'.

But that did not work either. On the 30th Trautloft recorded;

'I attempt an attack from the front in an effort to knock out the pilot. But he has, meanwhile, got a good lead and my machine just is not fast enough. In addition we are almost out of ammunition, so there is nothing else for it but to break off our attack.'

There was perhaps cold comfort for the Germans since the bombers did, in fact, come down, and all three pilots were credited with the destruction of a Potez. However, 30 August was to prove a bad day for Trautloft. Again flying in his tennis gear, on a later mission he was bounced by an enemy fighter whose machine gun fire raked the right wing of his Heinkel, sending it into a spiral dive. With his controls shot away, Trautloft decided to 'jump', and opened his parachute at about 8000 ft. The attacking Republican fighter attempted to return for a second pass and open fire at the vulnerable German airman, but Eberhardt and Knüppel chased him away. As Trautloft related;

'In spite of these encouraging results against the Potez, it was clear that our aircraft were not superior enough for us to feel completely safe from the enemy. In fact, on 30 August, I was, for my part, shot down and had to bail out. I was lucky that I was not wounded and that I landed behind Nationalist lines. However, Franco's troops were, of course, not only surprised to see a tennis player landing in their positions by

With his parachute strapped to his back, the observer of a Republican Breguet 19 climbs into his seat at Getafe in July 1936 while a mechanic checks the bracing wire just prior to take-off. The aircraft carries bombs under its wings for deployment against Nationalist columns during the advance on Madrid. At this time there were between 60 and 70 Breguets on strength with the Republicans, and they were among the earliest adversaries for the German He 51 pilots. Built by Construcciones Aeronáuticas S.A. (CASA) at Getafe, and formed of a mainly fabric-covered metal airframe with corrugated metal skinning around the forward fuselage and cockpit areas, the reconnaissance and light bomber had first appeared in 1921. It quickly gained a reputation for being one of the most versatile aircraft of the time. The Breguet 19 also enjoyed fame following several notable long-distance flights in the late 1920s. During the Spanish Civil War the aircraft served with the air forces of both sides. Armament consisted of a pair of machine guns mounted on a Scarff ring fitted to the observer's position, although there was an option for a fixed, forward-firing machine gun mounted above the engine and, occasionally, another gun firing through a hatch in the fuselage floor. In August 1936 a number of Republican Breguet 19s were moved south to Andújar and Herrera del Duque to provide air cover for units retreating in the face of Franco's columns as they advanced on Madrid

parachute, they were also very suspicious of me. I did not speak Spanish very well and I suppose they thought that I could have been a foreign volunteer for the “Red Army”. I proved to them that this was not the case by showing them my passport. In it was written “*Este aparate y su piloti Don. Hannes Trautloft, estan al servicio del Ejercito Nacional del Norte*”. After having carefully read these lines, the Spanish officer shook my hand and I was treated in a very friendly fashion.’

Of the time at Escalona del Prado, Knüppel wrote;

‘A fighter pilot must always be ready for action. We flew other pilots back in a Ju 52 in rotation in order to fetch aviation fuel for our next flights over the front. Our mechanics worked untiringly to maintain the engines and machine guns. We – as the “*Kette Eberhardt*” – flew four to five times daily to the front, with a view of the buildings of Madrid lying in the distance in the haze of the sun. Eberhardt, Trautloft and I proudly called ourselves “the *Jäger* from Guadarrama”.’

But the definition of ‘*Jäger*’ was about to be stretched when demands on the fighter pilots began to take a different perspective as the ground warfare intensified.

On 4 September, after ferocious fighting left many buildings burned and ruined, the northern border town of Irún was taken by the rebels, while on the 13th, the Basques surrendered San Sebastian to the insurgents. Meanwhile, Yagüe had reached Talavera on his drive to Madrid. The Nationalists were gaining ground. For the first time, on 15 September, the Heinkels flew a mission in direct support of friendly ground forces advancing along the Tajo valley, when they were called upon to conduct a low-level strafing mission against Republican infantry. For this operation the group was relocated south, to Navalmorales, not far from the walled city of Ávila between the Sierra de Gredos and the Sierra de la Paramera. As Knüppel recalled;

‘We flew daily to-and-fro between Cáceres, Navalmorales and Talavera and accompanied the Spanish columns in the Tajo valley as they advanced on Madrid. It was here that Trautloft and Houwald brought down some enemy light bombers. This was greeted in especially lively fashion by the brave Moroccans of the Spanish Foreign Legion. At Navalmoral forward airfield, the *Morros* supplied us with tea and mutton when, after our first flight to the front in the Talavera region, we made an interim landing there for breakfast.

‘Starting from here, we also escorted the first Spanish Ju 52 bombers to the Front. In this way, we took part in the capture of Maquedas. This village, and road nodal point, was especially heavily defended by the enemy. The road from Madrid to Maquedas was choked with trucks and cars, taxis and various other types of vehicles, in which enemy troops had been brought up. Some bombs dropped by our Spanish comrades into these columns caused the enemy to panic so that that village was soon captured and enemy troops hastily driven away to the east.’

However, on 17 September the Germans’ simmering concerns about the combat standing of their Heinkels grew when, on a mission to engage enemy bombers attacking a Nationalist column, a lone Republican D.372 fighter, accompanied by a single Hawker Fury, bore in on the German biplanes and forced them to scatter. The Heinkels were only ‘rescued’ once a second *Kette* of three aircraft arrived and finally the

Republican fighters pulled away. This, together with the failed attacks against the Potez bombers, had been a stark warning to the Germans, who recognised that they could not in any way assume that they had air superiority while flying the He 51.

Such problems were discussed during the warm evenings following daily operations. Then, the German pilots would enjoy a cold *cerveza* or a glass of *vino tinto* at a café on the plaza of a nearby Spanish village with the Italian CR.32 pilots of the *Escuadrilla de Caza* of the *Aviación del Tercio*, who had been enjoying success in equal measure to the Germans in the Talavera area, as well as the Spanish Nationalist pilots. As the light faded and more alcohol was consumed, the pilots of all three nations would raise toasts to each other and break out into song.

On 23 September, the German *Jagdstaffel* was ordered briefly to Ávila in the first of what would become many temporary relocations to support the Nationalist ground offensives. They were then quickly relocated north to the Basque town of Vitoria, on the Bilbao front, where the Republicans continued to hold ground on the coast.

As always, going swiftly into action, the Heinkel pilots accounted for the destruction of three enemy aircraft on 26 September – a Vickers Vildebeest for von Houwald and a Breguet 19 each for Klein and Hefter. The mood within the German contingent grew more sombre, however, when, two days later, it suffered its first loss in Spain. The wing of Leutnant Ekkehard Hefter's He 51 struck the tower of the town hall in Vitoria shortly after he had taken off for a mission. Apparently, his aircraft developed engine trouble and he was unable to make it back to the field, although one source states that, in fact, Hefter had been demonstrating his skills at low-level flying, which he had been taught at the *Jagdfliegerschule* in Schleissheim, for the benefit of the locals.

The wreckage of Leutnant Ekkehard Hefter's He 51 burns in front of the town hall in Vitoria on 28 September 1936. Hefter was the first German fighter pilot to be killed in Spain



Whatever the case, his Heinkel crashed into the plaza at Vitoria and burst into flames.

The next day the unit moved back to Ávila, from where on the 30th Trautloft finally managed to inflict sufficient damage on a Potez 540 that it crashed into the ground. *Staffel* commander Eberhardt claimed a second Potez.

By the end of September, the small German fighter squadron had shot down seven Breguets (Eberhardt two and one apiece to Trautloft, Knüppel, Hefter, Klein and von Houwald), four Ni-H.52s (two each to Knüppel and von Houwald), seven Potez 540s (Eberhardt three, and Trautloft and Knüppel two each) and a Vickers Vildebeest (von Houwald). The highest scorer was Oberleutnant Kraft Eberhardt with six aircraft to his credit, while Oberleutnant Herwig Knüppel had five.

On 30 September the Nationalists named Franco as their supreme commander and head of state, with their headquarters in Burgos. Although they had so far fought a reasonably successful war, their forces remained formed of slender marching columns either striking at Madrid from the south, driving into Aragón from the north or fighting to gain control of the passes of the Sierra de Guadarrama.

Meanwhile, back in Germany, *Sonderstab W* had arranged for further shipments of war materiel to Spain, including millions of rounds of ammunition, 2000 hand grenades, 86 tons of bombs, signals equipment and field wire and 45 trucks. For air support, a further 36 He 51s had been assigned – 24 for the Nationalist air force and 12 as reinforcements for Eberhardt's little *Staffel*, as well as three more Ju 52/3m bombers, a twin-engined He 59 float-equipped biplane and single-engined He 60 floatplane for maritime patrol operations, a Heinkel He 50 bomber/reconnaissance aircraft and a pair of Henschel Hs 123s. These latter aircraft, being sent with pilots and specialist maintenance crews, were intended for testing in field conditions. Crucially, also creeping in to the German plans was the decision to send three prototypes of the new, state-of-the-art Messerschmitt Bf 109 monoplane fighter – again, essentially for testing and evaluation.

Ominously, in a low-key development, on 10 September Russian civilian agents and military technicians had secretly established themselves at the Republican airfields of Los Alcazares and Carmoli in order to receive Soviet fighters and bombers that were being shipped in and due to arrive within weeks. The war in Spain – particularly in terms of foreign intervention – was intensifying, and showing no sign of an early end.

By the beginning of October 1936 six of the new batch of He 51s had arrived in Spain, together with ten volunteer pilots and more mechanics – 'a necessary and welcome strengthening', as Knüppel described it. 'Just like we had done two months previously, they had put together their He 51 single-seaters in Seville, for which we soon almost fell around their necks with joy.'

This latest batch of pilots comprised Oberleutnante Dietrich von Bothmer, Oskar Henrici and Günther Radusch, Leutnante Kurt von Gilsa, Paul Rehahn and Hennig Strümpell and Unteroffiziere Willi Gödecke, Kowalski, Ernst Mratzek and Erwin Sawallisch. With fresh heart, it was now possible to split the *Jagdstaffel* into two elements – five



A parachute has been placed on the wing of He 51 2-19 and the cockpit door left down in readiness for an *Alarmstart* at an airfield in northern Spain in the autumn of 1936

aircraft under Trautloft would head north on 5 October to León to escort supply and bombing missions around the Nationalist enclave at Oviedo in Asturias, while the others, under Eberhardt, went to Barahona and eventually on to Zaragoza. Communications between the two *Ketten* would be maintained by a solitary Fokker F VII that had been assigned to the *Staffel*. The unit's original three He 51s were handed over to the Spanish.

At Zaragoza, the Heinkels made their presence felt when, on 19 October, a *Kette* formed of von Houwald, Strümpell and Henrici was attacked by 13 Republican aircraft, but shot down five of their number on the Alcubierre, northeast of Zaragoza. Henrici claimed a Ni-H.52C, a Breguet 19 and a Fokker F VII, while von Houwald and Strümpell each accounted for a Nieuport. 'Henrici alone had shot down three', recalled Knüppel. 'He rammed one of them, a Breguet 19, on its wing with his undercarriage. Afterwards, he said quite simply, "Well, after that he really 'fell out of his slippers"''. Our Oskar – we all called Henrici by his first name – was able to fetch the devil out of hell, if it came to that. And our mechanics and armourers were as pleased as we were about this success. They had, again and again, untiringly put the machine guns and engines in order, and had thereby helped the pilots to achieve success'.

By now more Heinkels had arrived, and the strength of the fighter *Staffel* increased to 14 He 51s.

Following the heavy bombardment of Madrid starting from 29 October, the Nationalists launched a concerted drive on the capital in early November, its forces coming under the overall command of Gen José Enrique Iglesias Varela. Although the Republican militia fought desperately to defend it, the government was forced to move to Valencia. On 4 November the Nationalists took the airport at Getafe, and two days later, although outnumbered with just over 12,000 men supported by a handful of armoured cars and light tanks, they had reached the outskirts of the city. The one million inhabitants of Madrid had been mobilised and cajoled with increasingly extreme Communist rhetoric to defend the city to the last. Women were to pour burning oil



Newly delivered He 51B-1s await flight-testing after their re-assembly in Spain in the autumn of 1936. This photograph was probably taken at either León or Zaragoza. The relatively short range of the Heinkel was extended by the fitting of a 170-litre drop tank as seen here

on the enemy if necessary, while the Republican Gen José Miaja told his forces on 13 November, with some exaggeration, 'Fighters – today you are going to crush 50,000 men'.

The Nationalists had overlooked one vital development – the arrival of Soviet reinforcements for the Republicans. Around this time the first Russian Polikarpov I-15 and I-16 fighters had begun to arrive in Spain, with 18 I-15s going to Cartagena, together with Russian pilots under the command of a Russian general. This first shipment was followed by 12 more that were transferred at sea from a Soviet ship to a Spanish freighter. Eighteen more I-15 fighters, along with 50 Soviet tanks and 150 Russian air force personnel, would arrive at Cartagena days later.

Like the German Heinkels, the I-15s were quickly assembled in an olive grove near Alcantarilla and formed up into two *escuadrillas*. For the Nationalists, who assumed Republican air power had been all but eliminated, the appearance of Soviet fighters and bombers came as a rude shock. And enemy troops seemed to emboldened by the Polikarpovs and Tupolev SB '*Katiushka*' bombers in the skies above them. On 6 November, two of Eberhardt's He 51s were damaged during an enemy air attack on Ávila by the fast Russian twin-engined SB bombers. Five days later Republican Tupolev bombers again targeted Ávila, dropping 18 50 kg bombs that destroyed or damaged several German aircraft, including He 51s and some He 46s and Ju 52/3ms.

Designed in 1933 and christened the 'Curtiss' by German pilots in Spain, the compact I-15 *Chato* (Snub-nose) was a very potent biplane fighter. Built of metal and powered by a 700 hp licence-built American Curtiss-Wright Cyclone radial engine known as the M-25, it possessed a maximum speed of 360 km/h, was highly manoeuvrable and carried an armament of four PV-1 7.62 mm machine guns.

Designed at almost the same time as the I-15 and delivered to frontline units within two years of the first drawings being made, the pugnacious Polikarpov I-16 *Mosca* (Fly) all-metal, low-wing monoplane fighter – dubbed the *Rata* (Rat) by German pilots – was powered by a 775 hp M-25B radial also developed from the Curtiss-Wright Cyclone



engine. The I-16 had a maximum speed of 455 km/h and carried an armament of two rapid-firing, wing-mounted 7.62 mm ShKAS machine guns, considered to be the best in the world, with a much heavier weight of firepower than the I-15. Although the cockpit construction, layout and instrumentation were rudimentary, what the I-16 lacked in sophistication it made up for in impressive manoeuvrability, rate of roll and diving speed, which could reach 600 km/h.

Spanish and Italian pilots had already experienced some early 'spats' with the Russian fighters over the Madrid Front during the first week of November, and results were mixed. Wary of the ever increasing number of Republican fighters now being encountered, Kindelán was forced to issue orders forbidding his He 51 pilots from entering combat unless they were assured of numerical superiority. Nevertheless, the first encounter for the Heinkels came on the 13th, and it was to be grim.

Already that day, as Yagüe fought to take the Casa de Campo park across the River Manzanares opposite what had been the Royal Palace in Madrid, 14 Spanish-flown CR.32s had engaged Republican I-15s in a fierce dogfight over the Paseo de Rosales. Two *Chatos* were shot down (including one by Spanish ace Morato for his 15th victory) and a further three damaged. The Fiats then ran into some SBs bombing Getafe and Cuatro Vientos. Meanwhile, the German Heinkels had also been called upon to render escort for five (German-flown) Ju 52/3ms and He 46s attacking enemy positions in the Casa de Campo district. Nine He 51s were despatched – all three *Ketten*. As Knüppel recorded;

'13 November 1936 was the blackest day for the *Jagdstaffel* Eberhardt. We flew in the afternoon as escort for the *Kampfstaffel* of Oberleutnant von Moreau, starting out from Ávila and heading to Madrid. Following the second bombing run, we were attacked by around 24 low-winged and biplane fighters (*Ratas* and "Curtisses") from above on the eastern

A Polikarpov I-15 *Chato* (Snub-nose) fighter, this example, coded CA-016, being an early Spanish licence-built aircraft operated by the Republican Grupo 26. Designed in 1933 and dubbed a 'Curtiss' by German pilots in Spain, the compact I-15 *Chato* was a very potent biplane fighter. Built of metal and powered by a 700 hp licence-built American Curtiss-Wright Cyclone radial engine known as the M-25, the I-15 possessed a maximum speed of 360 km/h, was highly manoeuvrable and carried an armament of four PV-1 7.62 mm machine guns

The highly-regarded Oberleutnant Kraft Eberhardt (centre), *Kapitän* of the first German fighter force in Spain, was killed on 13 November 1936 by enemy fire and then collided in mid-air with the Republican fighter he had intended to target. To the left in this photograph is Leutnant Dietrich von Bothmer while to the right is Leutnant Hennig Strümpell



Unteroffizier Erwin Sawallisch sits against the tailplane of a He 51 and clasps a bottle of local red wine during what appears to be a picnic on the flight line at Vitoria. Sawallisch shot down an I-15 for his first victory on 13 November 1936 – the day the *Jagdstaffel* Eberhardt lost its commander in action. Sawallisch would go on to score two more victories in Spain. Also seen here, to the left of Sawallisch, is Hauptmann Herwig Knüppel, who took over leadership duties from Kraft Eberhardt following his death

border of Madrid at an altitude of between 1200 -1500 metres. It developed into an exceedingly hard air battle.'

The enemy force consisted of 16 I-15s and eight I-16s, and they aimed for the *Kette* led by Henrici. Within that *Kette*, Unteroffizier Mratzek shot down a *Rata* as it dived past him, while the *Kette* leader accounted for another as the He 51s quickly sought the cover of some clouds. As the Heinkels turned and emerged from the cloud cover beneath the Russian aircraft, Knüppel and Sawallisch each shot one down, although in doing so the latter pilot suffered damage to his tailplane and had a difficult journey home.

Oberleutnant Eberhardt then targeted a 'Red' fighter, but he 'collided with an enemy biplane which he had shot down, and crashed fatally. Thus fell our brave *Staffelführer*', lamented Knüppel, 'whom we all held in high esteem because of his superb capabilities as a combat commander and Offizier. He led the *Staffel* with rare keenness into an attack. In his



brief period in Spain, he had brought down a whole number of enemy aircraft. We thus lost the best one in the *Staffel*.

Eberhardt had been shot through the heart and his He 51 went down in flames. His Soviet opponent was able to bail out of his I-15, however, and landed safely, but was subsequently kicked to death by a violent mob in the streets of Madrid who thought he was a German.

A disheartened von Houwald noted that;

‘On Friday, 13 November 1936, we encountered the *Ratas* for the first time and a wild mêlée resulted. We downed five of them, but what were these victories when compared with the loss of our *Staffelführer*? This only served to show that our good old He 51s were too slow compared with the new *Ratas* – they could play with us as they wanted. Furthermore, the Soviet “Martin Bombers” (SB *Katiuska*), which were arriving daily, were 50 km/h faster than us, and the people were scared of them. Feverishly, we waited for the Bf 109s to arrive from Germany.’

Henrici had also been shot – through the back, with a bullet penetrating his lung – but embarked on a death-defying attempt to return to base, as Knüppel recalled;

‘Oskar Henrici was wounded by a shot in the back fired from quite a distance. He thereupon attacked an enemy biplane and shot it down. Thereafter, he made a smooth landing behind our own lines, climbed out with the help of soldiers from the Falange – and then fell dead’. In fact Henrici had landed at Alcorcón and attempted to stand up in his cockpit, whereupon he slumped forward to take his last breath.

Knüppel continued, ‘This daredevil and cool lieutenant died like a hero. Eberhard and Henrici were posthumously awarded the highest Spanish decoration, the *Cruz de laureada* by Gen Franco. The rest of us fought on with the greatest of efforts and downed some more enemy aircraft. Lieutenant von Gilsa, who later fell in Spain, fought alongside “Piefke” Strümpell and “Philipp” Bothmer on this afternoon over Madrid and played havoc with the *Rojos*. When we landed in the late afternoon at Ávila, we had won the battle to be sure, but the best had been killed’.

In all, the mission of 13 November had seen the He 51 *Staffel* chalk up another five kills – all I-15s, including a seventh victory for Knüppel



Leutnant Dietrich von Bothmer was amongst the second batch of fighter pilots to go to Spain. He claimed two enemy aircraft shot down in late 1936



Leutnant Dietrich von Bothmer smiles for the camera from the cockpit of his He 51B-1 2-23 in late 1936, to which has been applied the distinctive 'Zylinderhut' emblem of 2.J/88. This aircraft may also have been flown by Oberleutnant Hannes Trautloft

– but not without sustaining a very 'bloody nose'. Eberhardt, a hugely popular and capable leader, and Henrici had been killed. Furthermore, operational cohesion had been lost in the shock of encountering such determined and effective aerial opposition from the I-15s and I-16s, and the Heinkels had been forced to scatter ignobly and return individually to Ávila, seeking as much cloud cover as possible. The Republicans announced the loss of four enemy fighters for two losses. Whether true or not, it was a great boost to their morale.

'I now had to take over the leadership of the *Jagdstaffel Eberhardt*', Knüppel recorded. 'In the period that followed – winter 1936/37 – we were pitched into all the battlefronts and thereby got to know the whole of Spain. León, Burgos, Vitoria, San Sebastian, Logrono, Zaragoza, Teruel, Barahona, Ávila, Escalona, Cordoba, Almorox – these were our combat airfields. The entire *Staffel* consisted of only 35 men, but we stuck together like *Pech und Schwefel* (pitch and sulphur).

'The groundcrews worked untiringly under the leadership of Unteroffiziere Spitzhüttl and Kempe. Once, in a low-level attack by enemy fighters, *Staffel* armourer Unteroffizier Eick, standing completely unprotected, shot down freehandedly one of the attackers with a rifle. This all goes to show how excellent the fighting spirit of our comrades was. We employed a White Russian by the name of Martschenko in the *Staffel*, who flew as the pilot of a three-engined Fokker transport aircraft. This man was quite tireless and a splendid comrade. He later fell as a bomber pilot for Nationalist Spain.'

For the Germans, they faced the daunting prospect that the remaining operative He 51s were largely out-manoeuvred, out-performed and out-gunned by the new Soviet fighters. In combat the aircraft had regrettably proved itself to be both representative of crude under-development



and uncompetitive in terms of design, with manually-loaded machine guns and a lack of radio equipment.

For the rest of 1936, Heinkel operations, under the command of Herwig Knüppel, were necessarily reduced. The unpalatable truth was that the I-16 was faster than the He 51, the I-15 more manoeuvrable in the climb and the 'friendly' CR.32 more robust. Even the SBs were faster. The He 51s scored just eight more kills to year-end – Leutnant Rehahn a Breguet 19 and an SB, Oberleutnant Trautloft an I-16, Leutnant von Bothmer an I-15, Leutnant von Gilsa an SB, Unteroffizier Sawallisch an SB, Unteroffizier Gödecke an SB and Hauptmann Palm an I-16.

Despite this, the four-year-old He 51 remained the Luftwaffe's main fighter type, and senior German airmen erroneously assumed that it was able to take on any enemy aircraft. It was therefore decided to send more of them to Spain. Another shipment of 60 crated biplanes, disguised as agricultural machinery, arrived in Seville on 18 November for assembly at Tablada. The reality was that the recent victories had been achieved not because of the obsolete fighter being deployed in Spain, but because of its pilots' skills – and for those pilots it must have been a blow that the Russians had produced a biplane fighter that was technically and operationally superior. Moreover, the Russian pilots were quickly refining their tactics, learning to use their speed, to fly in tight four-aircraft sections for protection and to dive and climb when fighting the He 51s.

Adding to a general sense of disillusionment within the German camp was the fact that by late November it had become plainly obvious that, despite strong Nationalist artillery bombardment, the crossing of the Manzanares and a penetration of the University City, the offensive to take Madrid had faltered. By 23 November both sides were exhausted. Varela's and Yagüe's forces simply lacked fighting strength now that Soviet military aid had arrived on the scene, and Franco accepted that his forces would have to move around the city, not through it.

Ironically, however, help was on its way – already at sea from Germany – in the form of a new *Legion*, with new equipment, fresh troops and led by confident new commanders.

He 51B-1 2-24, which was ultimately assigned to 2.J/88, was photographed before the application of the *Staffel's 'Zylinderhut'* emblem, which was later applied in its standard location forward of the first '2' of the fuselage code on the port side of the aircraft

COLOUR PLATES



1

He 51B-1 2-4 of Oberleutnant Hannes Trautloft, J/88, Tablada and Escalona del Prado, August 1936



2

He 112 V7 5-1 of Oberleutnant Günther Radusch, *Versuchsjagdgruppe* 88, Tablada, and Unteroffizier Max Schulz and Oberleutnant Wilhelm Balthasar, 1. and 2.J/88, 1936-37



3

He 51B-1 2-23 of Oberleutnant Hannes Trautloft and Leutnant Dietrich von Bothmer, 2.J/88, Tablada and Ávila, autumn 1936



4

He 51B-1 108 of J/88, Northern Front, early 1937



5
He 51B-1 2-64 of Oberleutnant Harro Harder,
Staffelkapitän 1.J/88, Vitoria, spring-summer 1937



6
Bf 109B-1 6-4 of VJ/88 and Leutnant Kurt von Gilsa and Unteroffizier Guido Höness, 2.J/88, Northern Front, summer 1937



7
He 51B-1 2-85 possibly of Leutnant Eduard
Neumann, 3.J/88, Northern Front, late 1937



8
Bf 109B-1 6-15 of Unteroffizier Otto Polenz, 1.J/88, Aragón Front, December 1937



9

He 51B-1 2-123 of 4.J/88, Aragón, late 1937/early 1938



10

He 51B-1 2-86 of Unteroffizier Erich Kuhlmann, 4.J/88, Calamocha, January 1938



11

He 51B-1 2-78 of Oberleutnant Adolf Galland, *Staffelkapitän* 3.J/88, Zaragoza, spring 1938



12

He 112 V9 8-2 of Oberleutnant Harro Harder, 1.J/88, possibly Tablada, April 1938



13

Bf 109D-1 6-51 of Oberleutnant Wolfgang Schellmann, *Staffelkapitän* 1.J/88, possibly Calamocha, June 1938



14

Bf 109D-1 6-75 of Leutnant Rudolf Goy, 3.J/88, La Sénia, September 1938



15

Bf 109D-1 6-56 of Hauptmann Gotthardt Handrick, *Kommandeur Stab* J/88, La Sénia, September 1938



16

Bf 109D-1 6-56 of Hauptmann Walter Grabmann, *Kommandeur Stab* J/88, La Sénia, September 1938



17

Bf 109D-1 6-79 of Hauptmann Werner Mölders, *Staffelkapitän* 3.J/88, possibly La Sénia, November 1938



18

Bf 109E-1 6-100 of J/88, La Sénia, late 1938



19

Bf 109E-3 6-107 of 2.J/88, Catalonia front, early 1939



20

Bf 109E-3 6-119 of Hauptmann Siebelt Reents, *Staffelkapitän* 1.J/88, León, spring 1939

37



21

Bf 109E-3 6-121 of Oberleutnant Karl-Wolfgang Redlich, 2.J/88, León, March 1939



22

Bf 109E-3 6-123 of Oberleutnant Hans Schmoller-Haldy, 3.J/88, March 1939



23

Bf 109E-3 6-126 of J/88, El Prat de Llobregat, Barcelona, spring 1939



24

Bf 109E-3 6-130 of Hauptmann Walter Grabmann, *Kommandeur Stab J/88*, possibly El Prat de Llobregat, Barcelona, March 1939

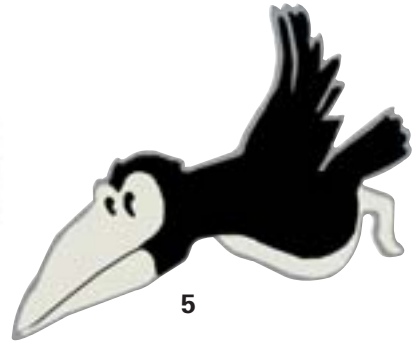
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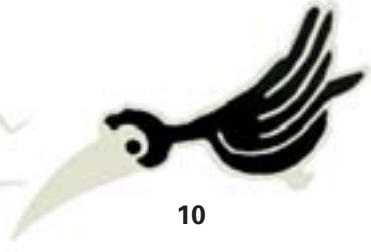


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14



A LEGION FROM GERMANY

In Berlin, in the autumn of 1936, the officers of *Sonderstab W* worked feverishly under the watchful eye of Hermann Göring to expand and accelerate German aid to Nationalist Spain. Following the failure of Franco's attempt to take Madrid, and the influx of Soviet war matériel to the Republican cause, the Nazis decided to intervene in the Spanish Civil War on a more entrenched and committed scale. On 7 November, as a consequence of these developments, it was decided to form a 'legion' with which to fight the threat of internationalised Bolshevism. To the world, this legion would be seen as embarking on a crusade against the dark forces of oppression. Hence was born the *Legion Condor*.

But Hitler's support had conditions. The expanded German force in Spain was to be placed under a German commander who would advise Franco. Those units already in Spain were to be integrated into the new Legion. German air bases in Spain would be given satisfactory protection, and operations were to be better coordinated, more regular and aimed at those ports through which Soviet aid was being routed. Franco needed the support and he agreed to the *Führer's* terms.

Assisting Wilberg in assembling and shipping out the new Legion were a number of capable administrative officers, including, as a typical example, Major Hermann Plocher of the organisational department of the Luftwaffe General Staff. When he took up his post, Plocher knew virtually nothing of the German intervention in Spain, but he was to be instrumental in setting up the infrastructure of the embryonic Legion. Still governed by extreme secrecy, Wilberg, Plocher and their team created a fictitious winter manoeuvre in the Baltic to be known as '*Winterübung Rügen*' (after the island in that sea), which included flying, flak, signals and communications elements drawn from existing Luftwaffe units.

Typically, personnel would be selected by their unit commanders on the grounds of those best qualified by intelligence and training, and asked whether they wished to volunteer for a special assignment. Pilots, for example, were attracted by promises of considerable opportunities to fly, but they were given no clue as to where or under what circumstances this would happen. According to Plocher, some were able to accept of their own volition, while others were simply given orders to pack their belongings, but under no circumstances could these men be considered as true 'volunteers'.

Oberleutnant Harro Harder, *Staffelkapitän* of 1.J/88, stands in dress uniform by his He 51B which is decorated with the cartoon emblem of a diving African Marabou used by 1. *Staffel*. His aircraft is also adorned – apparently uniquely – with a Swastika within the black Nationalist fuselage marking



A potent partnership – Generalmajor Hugo Sperrle (in profile with peaked cap), the first commander of the *Legion Condor* who served in Spain from October 1936 to October 1937, in discussion with senior Spanish and German officers at a hillside command post during operations in northern Spain in early 1937. A highly decorated airman during World War 1, and fond of his food, Sperrle was tough, impatient and blunt, but not without humour. He had left his post as commander of *Luftkreis-Kommando V* in Berlin for Spain in a Ju 52/3m on 31 October, travelling via Rome, together with his Chief of Staff, Major Alexander Holle. With Sperrle in this photograph is Oberstleutnant Dr.-Ing. Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen (in shirt and tie, looking at map). Holding a doctorate in engineering, he had arrived in Spain out of favour with his employers in the Ministry after voicing sceptical opinions about the theories of his superior, Ernst Udet, on dive-bombing. Von Richthofen believed that artillery fire would eliminate any advantages a Stuka had to offer at low altitude. In June 1936 he had prepared a confidential plan recommending the discontinuation of the Ju 87 dive-bomber, but Udet quickly overruled von Richthofen's directive and continued with development of the aircraft. This conflict between the blunt, hard-headed, self-confident Silesian and the flamboyant former stunt pilot, Udet, who had been appointed as Chief of the RLM Technical Office, resulted in von Richthofen's departure south. Quick-thinking and abrasive, both Sperrle and von Richthofen ensured that the *Legion Condor* benefited from dynamic and creative leadership

As the men and equipment began assembling at the port of Stettin, on the Baltic, Wilberg's team assigned the code name '*Eiserne Rationen*' ('Iron Rations') to the air contingent bound for Spain, but this was later changed to *Eiserne Legion* (Iron Legion). Then Plocher was instructed by Göring to change this once more to *Legion Condor*, and to use the names of birds for all of its components. However, Plocher found that attempting to create a 'menagerie' of avian nomenclature was highly confusing and quietly decided upon a simple numbering system whereby each unit would carry the designation '88', but all operating under the 'umbrella' of the *Legion Condor*, which would enjoy the equivalent status of a *Luftwaffe Fliegerkorps*.

Plocher drew up an order of battle which saw the establishment of a fighter or *Jagdgruppe* to be known as J/88, which was to form up with three *Staffeln* each with nine He 51s per *Staffel*. Additionally, there was to be a *Kampfgruppe*, or bomber group, to be known as K/88, *Aufklärungs* (reconnaissance) and *Aufklärungs See* (maritime reconnaissance) groups to be known as A/88 and AS/88, respectively, a Flak detachment as F/88 and a signals/communications group (a *Luftnachrichtenabteilung*) to be known as Ln/88. Adding to this force would be maintenance, hospital, supply, salvage, testing and experimental, meteorological and liaison elements. By 29 November 1936, thousands of men, hundreds of tanks, guns, aircraft, weapons and many tons of equipment had been shipped out of Stettin on 25 freighters, all bound for Cadiz.

Göring had chosen Generalmajor Hugo Sperrle, the gruff, bear-like commander of *Luftkreis-Kommando V*, to lead the *Legion*. A highly decorated airman during World War 1, and fond of his food, Sperrle was tough, impatient and blunt, but not without humour. He had left Berlin for Spain in a Ju 52/3m on 31 October, travelling via Rome, together with his Chief of Staff, Major Alexander Holle.

Meanwhile, the arrival of the 60 He 51s at Tablada in mid-November heralded the adoption of Plocher's new unit designation for the fighter group as *Jagdgruppe 88*. The *Gruppe* was to be led initially by Major Baier, who fell ill and was replaced by Hauptmann Hubertus Merhardt von Bernegg.



The three *Staffeln* were established as 1./J/88 under Hauptmann Werner Palm, 2./J/88 under Hauptmann Siegfried Lehmann and 3./J/88 under Hauptmann Jürgen Roth, who led a new batch of pilots that had recently arrived via Cadiz. These included Peter Boddem, Harro Harder, Erwin Kley, Günther Lützow, Douglas Pitcairn and Rolf Pingel. The original cadre of Heinkel pilots already in Spain were mustered into 4./J/88 under Oberleutnant Knüppel. By early December the *Gruppe* was ready for operations at Ávila and Escalona, and the pilots of 2. *Staffel* decided to create an identity for themselves, as Herwig Knüppel remembered;

‘At this time, we painted *Zylinderhut* (cylinder hats – top hats) on the aircraft, and we soon became known to the Spaniards as “*la escadrilla con los sombreros*” (the *Zylinderhutstaffel*). The meaning of this emblem was not clear to many people. We saw it as the *Angströhre*, or the “13th cylinder”, since the other 12 cylinders of the He 51s’ BMW engines were inadequate. It was incorrectly viewed by many as being a form of civilian flying club emblem. Those in the unit knew otherwise, however. But we had not given much thought to it. We merely wanted an amusing *Staffel* emblem, and came upon it through the words of the song “*Shön ist ein Zylinderhut*”.’

However, like their predecessors, the new pilots viewed operating conditions in Spain with some shock and disdain. Harro Harder lamented that Tablada was a ‘jackass station where the situation was awful. We would welcome an opportunity to sort things out. The fighters sit here and don’t go anywhere. The entire operation appears increasingly like some great escapade controlled by incompetent staff officers. Are our operations justified by results? Why can’t we have better aircraft?’

Another – formidable – German presence arrived in Spain at this time in the form of Oberstleutnant Dr.-Ing. Wolfram *Freiherr* von Richthofen, the erstwhile *Leiter der Abteilung Prüfwesen* (Head of Testing and Development) in the RLM. Von Richthofen, who held a doctorate in engineering, had arrived in Spain out of favour with his employers in the Ministry after he voiced sceptical opinions about the theories of his superior, Ernst Udet, on dive-bombing, believing that artillery fire would eliminate any advantages a *Stuka* had to offer at low altitude.

In June 1936 von Richthofen had prepared a confidential plan recommending the discontinuation of the Ju 87 dive-bomber, but Udet quickly overruled his directive and continued with development of the aircraft. This conflict between the blunt, hard-headed, self-confident Silesian and the flamboyant former stunt pilot, Udet, who had been appointed as Chief of the RLM Technical Office, resulted in von Richthofen’s departure south to Spain. Here, he took over command of *Versuchs-Kommandos* 88, an embryonic testing and evaluation staff intended to formally assess the performance of the *Legion Condor*’s aircraft in combat.

Von Richthofen flew into Seville from Rome on 29 November, and his first impressions were not good;

‘My accommodation is a very bad room in the Hotel Andalucia. From the *Versuchsgruppe* there is as yet nobody, but just some matériel, a part of which is already lying around at the harbour and in an area of Tablada airport. Transport and distribution, information on the arrivals of the steamers and loading lists are all completely unknown. Whatever arrives

2./J/88’s new ‘*Zylinderhutstaffel*’ emblem was painted onto a wooden sign and strategically placed outside the unit quarters at Tablada in late 1936. ‘We had not given much thought to it’, remembered Herwig Knüppel. ‘We merely wanted an amusing *Staffel* emblem’





Although wind and mud usually played a vital part in many of the landing mishaps that befell German aircraft in Spain during the conflict, on this occasion ground conditions appear to be good and the two-blade propeller seems not to have been damaged when the aircraft nosed over. This He 51 is believed to have been 2-64, as flown by *Legion Condor* experte and commander of 1.J/88, Oberleutnant Harro Harder. The aircraft was distinctive for its 'double' Nationalist upper wing markings, a crude form of 'lozenge' camouflage and the painting of a Swastika on the mid-wing upper surface. Note also the skull and crossbones just above the propeller hub

will be unloaded, and we will have to search for its "master" and purpose. The unloaded materiel is often unusable since many of the important items are often missing. Am greeted by the Chief of Staff, Holle, who is worn out and wants to be left in peace. I report to General *Sander* (code name for Sperrle), who complains about the complete lack of knowledge in Berlin of local conditions here.'

Such is how the *Legion Condor* went to war.

On the 30th von Richthofen attempted to 'to compile an overall picture'. He noted in his diary that, 'Red air attacks appear to be gradually setting in. In the last 14 days, they have increased from two to three, and they have now made six bombing raids on Seville and Cadiz. These are only frivolous and without any effect. Red fighters have only been seen up to now in the Madrid area. Our own operations there, without fighter protection, by day, are considered impossible. At other locations, no Red fighters have been observed. However, if we conduct daylight raids, their surprise appearance is feared as a probability. Our own *Kampf-* and *Jagdgruppen* are to go, whenever possible, into the Salamanca-Ávila area and southwards in order to, initially, conduct combined sorties and to give the *Morros* a breathing space. The *Versuchsgruppe* shall, according to local and time conditions, be attached in appropriate form to the *Jagdgruppe* in order to be effective from Ávila'.

In fact the *Kette* of machines forming Palm's 1.J/88, which comprised 11 pilots, was just about operational by the end of November, and was moved north to Burgos for a few days before being relocated to Vitoria on 4 December, from where the first victory was claimed by Hauptmann Palm on the 16th when he shot down an I-16. A black moment occurred on 20 December when 1. *Staffel* accidentally shot



down an Italian aircraft which did little to harmonise relations with the pilots of the *Regia Aeronautica*.

The He 51s of 2./J/88 commenced air superiority sorties over Madrid in late December after the *Staffel* had moved to Villa del Prado on the 22nd of that month. The pilots of J/88 evaluated various tactical methods to both attack enemy aircraft and to defend friendly bombers, and they also had complete freedom in devising such tactics. The only condition, in accordance with orders from Sperrle, was that in the Madrid area, daylight escort operations by J/88 for the Ju 52/3ms of K/88 bombing vehicle columns were restricted to dawn and dusk. Despite these challenges, on 8 December Trautloft and von Bothmer of 4./J/88 had each shot down a *Rata*. Aside from a run of four victories on the 12th, when von Gilsa, Rehahn, Sawallisch and Gödecke each claimed SB-2s, only Palm accounted for an I-16 to score the sole German fighter victory for the rest of the month.

From late December to the spring of 1937, J/88 fought a challenging campaign against a numerically and technically superior opposing force. At 1110 hrs on 4 January, 2. *Staffel* went operational for the first time when an *Alarm* flight from Ávila escorted two formations of Ju 52/3ms over Torrijos, but the mission proved uneventful. In early February, Lehmann, who had fallen ill from inflammation of the kidneys, handed command of the *Staffel* to Oberleutnant Otto-Hans Winterer, who oversaw a series of false *Alarmstarts* while based at Almorox. Lehmann returned to the unit on 20 February to resume command, but Winterer, who continued to fly, was shot down by flak over Navalmorales on the 25th and captured by Republican forces.

Much of this failure to generate meaningful success during J/88's early period of operations in Spain is probably a reflection of the prevailing Luftwaffe inter-war fighter combat doctrine which remained steeped

Hauptmann Werner Palm, commander of 1.J/88, stands between an He 51 and a Mercedes diesel truck adorned with *Legion Condor* markings on both front wheel arches. Its number plate also bears the prefix 'LC', denoting that the Mercedes is indeed a *Legion* vehicle. Palm is believed to have scored two victories in Spain

Officers of *Jagdgruppe 88* discuss the latest battlefield situation under the wing of a Fieseler Fi 156 communications and courier aircraft – one of six such machines sent to Spain. At first left is Oberleutnant Helmut-Felix Bolz, who claimed two enemy aircraft in mid-November 1938, although they were unconfirmed. His third victory, over an I-15 on 21 January 1939, marked J/88's 300th victory. Bolz was awarded the Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords for his combat exploits. Although this photograph was taken in 1938, it serves as a good illustration of how the air units of the *Legion Condor* operated closely with Nationalist ground forces to provide maximum support – something on which the Luftwaffe would place great emphasis in its later campaigns in Poland and Russia



in the lore of World War 1. Firstly, German air power strategists believed firmly in the essential need to hold a technological edge over an opponent, and with the He 51 pitted against the *Chato* and the *Mosca*, this requirement could not be met.

Secondly, as a direct result of the air war over the trenches of the Western Front in 1917-18, German air-to-air tactics were founded on the principle of despatching mass numbers of fighter aircraft on patrol in order to achieve a local, temporary, but decisive level of air superiority that was brought about by individual pilots engaging in personal combat to inflict attrition on the enemy. The success of iconic pilots such as Boelcke and von Richthofen was testimony to the method of closing in on an enemy aircraft, alone, preferably from above, and keeping him in sight and opening fire when success was guaranteed. This was the tactical doctrine which German fighter pilots took with them to Spain to use – as their World War 1 mentors had done – with a biplane.

In the skies over the Madrid Front, chivalry and personal engagement had gone. Air superiority could no longer be assured by tight, arrowhead formations of fighters prepared to undertake extended dogfights. The He 51s of Jürgen Roth's 3.J/88, which, from the start, had been intended to undertake ground-attack sorties, found themselves in trouble when, during an aerial battle over Madrid on 6 January, Leutnant Hans-Peter von Gallera and his wingman were shot down. Unteroffizier Walter Leyerer was also forced to land in open countryside, his aircraft having been hit 12 times.

The fact was that, slowly but surely, the open-cockpit He 51 was becoming an aircraft not fit for purpose. Many pilots grew to dislike it intensely, viewing it as a 'beast to be mastered'. It was quickly realised that communicating via hand signals because of a lack of radios and relying on machine guns which had to be manually charged every time they were fired was not conducive to successful combat operations.

When sent to operate against formations of Republican bombers or ground-attack aircraft, the Heinkels were unable to penetrate their screens of I-15 or I-16 escort fighters. Survival was only possible if

a minimum of three He 51s aimed for the bombers from a superior altitude while at least one *Kette* attempted to take on the fighters. This proved a costly and ineffective tactic. Furthermore, the hapless Heinkel laboured under a glaring 113 km/h speed disadvantage against the SB-2 bomber.

When it came to escorting Nationalist bombers, the Heinkel also failed to provide adequate protection against Republican fighters. Over Madrid, both I-15s and I-16s had little trouble penetrating the He 51 fighter screen to get at the Ju 52/3m bombers. Increasing the Junkers' armament to

five machine guns did little to help, and the aircraft was temporarily withdrawn from daylight bombing. Even worse was the fact that, on occasion, He 51s were forced to seek the protection of the increased firepower installed in the Junkers tri-motors!

Eventually, enough was enough. In mid-January 1937, the CO of J/88, Hauptmann Merhardt, aware of the wholly unrealistic and disadvantageous odds under which his pilots were expected to fight, drafted a report to Generalmajor Sperrle in which he protested at the technical shortcomings of the He 51, and advised that he would no longer be sending his men on missions to engage the enemy.

An infuriated Sperrle immediately flew to J/88's headquarters and was met by Merhardt as he disembarked from his aircraft. A tense 'face-to-face' showdown ensued in which Merhardt defiantly refused to sanction operations against the enemy air force and if that was found not to be acceptable then he would request to be relieved of his command and shipped back to Germany. After a moment in which he composed himself, Sperrle turned on his heel and strode back to his aircraft. Nothing more was heard of the matter, until orders were received changing the entire tactical deployment of the He 51. To his credit, Sperrle had taken up the matter with *Sonderstab W*, and from Berlin Wilberg directed that with immediate effect the He 51 would fly only 'low-level attacks against enemy frontlines'.

In reality, the withdrawal of the He 51 as a fighter aircraft and its deployment in the close-support role was not an innovation, nor had there been any premeditated intention on the part of the Germans to carry out battlefield support missions at the outset of operations in Spain.

Ground-attack had been seen as a secondary mission for fighters since the 1920s, and what Wilberg was probably trying to do by switching roles was to field-test the aircraft, as well as existing tactical doctrine. What was undeniable, however, was that the He 51 was redundant as an air superiority machine. This had been proven beyond all doubt during a raid by Ju 52/3ms of the *Legion Condor* on Bilbao in January 1937, when the He 51's 'lack of teeth' resulted in the fighter screen they were providing being defeated by attacking I-15s that inflicted twice as many losses on the bombers as they suffered themselves. The Ju 52/3ms were forced to abort the mission in panic, dropping their bombs in open countryside.

In fact, so adverse was the effect of the He 51's technological and tactical shortcomings that in failing to achieve air superiority, the *Legion Condor* suffered an alarming 20 per cent loss rate during January 1937, due mainly to Republican fighter supremacy.

The change in mission meant that Lehmann's 2.J/88 with ten He 51s was moved to Vitoria, in northern Spain, while another *Staffel* was sent to León. The other units remained on the Madrid Front at Escalona and Ávila. From Vitoria, the Heinkels engaged in regular ground-attack missions, dropping fragmentation bombs on Basque positions and



A pair of Russian Tupolev SB-2 *Katiuska* bombers in Republican markings. In terms of speed, the He 51 struggled to contend with this fast bomber, providing the Germans with a sobering problem when it came to shooting them down during Republican raids on Nationalist troops in the frontline or the *Legion Condor*'s airfields

Lacking drop tanks, these He 51s were probably photographed on a short-duration flight. The nearest aircraft, 2-64, was that of Oberleutnant Harro Harder of 1.J/88 which, somewhat unusually, featured a white Swastika in the centre of the black Nationalist circle. His decision to use the Nazi symbol was not always well received. The aircraft also carries the cartoon Marabou bird emblem of 1. Staffel

strafing road transport where enemy forces had launched an attack at Villarreal de Alava. In this role, the He 51 gave a better account of itself, although much of its effectiveness was down to the skilful flying and fearlessness of its pilots, who often undertook sorties at extreme low-level and in poor weather.

Missions usually constituted the He 51s flying in a close 'Vic' echelon formation so as to ensure a concentrated strike, the aircraft being armed carrying four 10 kg splinter bombs on racks. The weapons were dropped, upon a vigorous head signal made by the formation leader, without the aid of bomb sights at a height of about 150 m on roads, bridges, trenches and troops.

Von Richthofen, who had now replaced Holle as Chief of Staff of the *Legion Condor*, recognised that the theories of air power and Spanish politics did not have much in common. The stalemate on the ground, the lack of suitable strategic targets and the great Nationalist weakness in artillery led him to consider using much of the *Legion* to directly support Franco's offensive against Bilbao. Thus, for a brief period, the He 51s were used as 'flying artillery' as strong Basque forces tried to force open a route south to capture Vitoria.

Throughout January 1937, J/88 accounted for just three enemy aircraft shot down – all of these scored on the 4th, when Sawallisch (third victory), von Houwald (fifth victory) and Harder each claimed an I-16 in the Bilbao area while covering Ju 52/3ms bombing enemy positions. Harder described his first kill for a subsequent propaganda article;

'I hear machine guns behind me. A Red is coming for me sharply from above, his radial engine appearing like a giant eye. I pull "2-64" into a turn and the Red streaks past with two of our fighters already in pursuit. Far below, down in the valley, I see one turning around. Using my superior speed I know I can block him off. I get behind him, fire, he turns, I cut him off, another turn, the smoke twists from my tracer shells



disappear into his machine. Now he climbs, black, with a red band in front of the tail, rolls onto his back and plunges almost vertically to the ground. I pull myself together – the intoxication has blinded me to everything else going on. I see an He 51 nearby. Exhausted, I pull up and fly to Vitoria, where I make a low-level loop over the airfield.’

Meanwhile, frustrated in their attempt to take Madrid, in early January 1937, the Nationalists launched the first of their major flanking offensives. The attack, designed to cut off Madrid from the Sierra Guadarrama and surround it from the north, began with heavy bombardment and infantry advances backed by light tanks. The Nationalists managed to take some 16 km of the key Coruña road, as well as the towns of Villanueva de la Cañada, Boadilla, Majadahonda, and Pozuelo. Volunteer ‘International Brigades’ were rushed to the front by the Republicans to try to stem the advance until regular Spanish units could be brought up.

The Republican counter-attack was confused, and although it suffered 15,000 casualties in its execution, it had no effect. The Nationalist forces lost about the same numbers for the gain of a small amount of territory. The battle was another frustrating stalemate for the Nationalists.

In early February, Gen Orgaz had launched a new offensive for the Nationalists towards the road to Valencia that saw the Republicans pushed back across the Jarama River valley and Orgaz’ forces taking bridges across the swollen river from which they attempted to break through to Arganda. A bitter battle ensued involving hand-to-hand combat, knives, bayonets and grenades. Determined resistance by the International Brigades, equipped on this occasion with new French machine guns, once again brought the offensive to a halt.

A Republican counter-offensive proved ineffective and both sides – Franco’s mounted Moroccan horsemen and legionnaires of the *Ejército de Africa* opposed by the Republican International Brigades – suffered massive casualties running to more than 20,000 a side. But the result was yet another stalemate, with the Nationalists capturing more territory at high cost while the Republicans prevented the severing of the Valencia road, a vital lifeline to the city. By 16 February the Nationalist offensive was over.

Two subsequent attacks on 23 February and 1 March by the Nationalists to renew the Jarama offensive were ineffective, costing them a further 6000 casualties.

Although very much up against it on the ground, an area of encouragement for the Republicans lay in their use of air power. Fitted with 10 kg bombs, their I-15s, supported by formations of Russian-flown Polikarpov R-5 biplane reconnaissance-bombers carrying 50 kg bombs, attacked enemy columns ceaselessly. Despite Nationalist fighter patrols, and in increasingly worsening weather, the determined Republicans, with their Soviet allies, gained air superiority over the Jarama, shooting down significant numbers of Spanish-flown Ju 52/3ms, while the outnumbered Italian CR.32 escorts, forced to adopt more cautious measures to ensure their own survival, would turn for home. On 9 February, two He 51s were downed in flames during combat with Republican fighters, and on the 14th Heinkels failed to protect Ju 52/3ms heading to Arganda to bomb enemy troop concentrations because of an attack by Soviet fighters.

In mid-February more fighter pilots arrived in Spain, although some, as in the case of a young airman by the name of Adolf Galland, must have wondered if they had done the right thing. The experiences of Galland, who would go on to command *Jagdgeschwader* 26 and later the entire Luftwaffe fighter arm as the General der Jagdflieger in World War 2, were quite typical. Like many of his fellow pilots in Germany, Galland, having witnessed the return to the homeland of the first sun-tanned Spanish 'veterans' with bulging pay packets, was drawn by the whole sense of adventure surrounding the *Legion Condor*, as well as the chance to fly in combat.

Applying at the offices of *Sonderstab W*, he was accepted and soon found himself in civilian clothes as a 'tourist' with the *Reisegesellschaft Union*, along with 370 other Germans, on board a 3000-ton tramp steamer organised by the *'Kraft durch Freude'* (Strength through Joy) organisation, flying the Panamanian flag bound – 'officially' – for Genoa. The sense of adventure quickly dissipated. As Galland described it in his memoirs, the ship was 'a rotten old tub, more like a slave trader'. There was an overpowering stench of something unpleasant on board, and the airless accommodation in the holds, to which the men had been confined, was 'shamelessly primitive'. Bunks had been assembled crudely from old, spare timber, boredom reigned, followed inevitably by a gradual breakdown in discipline. Spirits 'sank below zero'.

Galland described the voyage to his post-war Allied interrogators in 1945;

'Conditions on the boat were not as we had imagined. I was senior officer in charge. From the captain of the ship, Capt van Ehren, I heard the whole story. A German veteran flier named Joseph Veltjens (a 35-victory ace and holder of the *Pour le Mérite* from World War 1, he had traded as an arms dealer post-war) arranged all these trips as a private individual so as to keep the German government's hands clean. Veltjens was a swindler who sold to both sides in the Civil War. The boat on which we were sailing had been captured by Franco's forces when it had been running guns for the Republic and was in bad shape – its sanitary facilities being especially bad. The boat had originally been ordered to go to Ireland to pick up Irish volunteers for Franco's forces, but Franco apparently declined the services of any more Irishmen, supposedly because they just looted too much.

'Since everyone on board was in civilian clothes, there was no way of telling rank, so morale sank. I asked that officers and NCOs show their grade by using coloured armbands. The promised eight-day trip stretched to ten, eleven and, finally, twelve days. In the Bay of Biscay, motor trouble developed and French naval vessels drew uncomfortably close. When food and water ran out, mutiny was so near that I ordered some unruly characters to be tied to the mast until they calmed down. Through all this, the men rankled under the thought that their security orders required them to state if the ship were stopped that they were all on a "*Kraft durch Freude*" trip to Genoa.'

Finally, the ship lumbered into El Ferrol harbour, in Galicia in northwest Spain, on 8 May 1937.

At around this time another two emissaries from Berlin arrived at Escalona del Prado in the shape of Oberst Robert *Ritter* von Greim,



the former *Kommodore* of JG 132 at Döberitz, who was acting as Inspector of Fighter and Ground-Attack Aviation, and skilled pilot Major i.G. Hans Seidemann, who was attached to the RLM. The two men had been instructed to make a serious evaluation of the He 51 following the negative reports reaching Berlin from Spain of the aircraft's relative performance, especially against the I-16. Seidemann actually flew on one mission, and upon his return to Escalona belly-landed the Heinkel in which he was flying. It did not take long before von Greim and Seidemann realised that everything that had been stated in the reports about the He 51 was true. Berlin would be informed. New aircraft were needed to counter the Republican dominance.

Summing up the air battles around the Spanish capital, Harro Harder wrote;

'We were all convinced that it was madness to continue sending the He 51s on escort missions over Madrid. The *Ratas* played cat and mouse with us. Even the "Martin" (SB) bombers were at least 50 km/h faster than us. The morale of the pilots was excellent, but all the guts in the world were useless with such technical inferiority. So once again we were to be employed in low-level attacks. Apparently, several more of us would have to be shot down before they became convinced of the stupidity of these orders.'



A row of four He 51Bs of J/88 photographed in 1937 following the application of a camouflage pattern in place of the previously plain finish. Generally, as low-level, ground-attack missions became more commonplace for the Heinkels, units adopted camouflage schemes that varied from aircraft to aircraft, as seen here

A recipient of the Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds, Oberleutnant Harro Harder (right) scored his first victory in Spain on 4 January 1937 when he shot down an I-16 in the Bilbao area. Harder would eventually be accredited with 11 victories while with the *Legion Condor*, and he commanded 1.J/88 from early April to mid-December 1937. Sat alongside him here is Oberleutnant Douglas Pitcairn, leader of 3.J/88 from April to July 1937 and recipient of the Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords

A NEW MESSERSCHMITT FIGHTER

For much of late 1936, there was a bullish, belligerent mood in the corridors of German power which was reflected in the fact that on Christmas Day Generaloberst Göring decreed that the German aviation industry was to go over to what was effectively a mobilisation footing. Procurement and production of matériel was to be carried out without regard to any budgets set previously by the RLM. Workers from across German industry who had received training in aircraft production were to take up the places previously assigned to them in case of war.

Emerging – and benefiting – from this environment of stimulated industrial output was a new aircraft, fresh off the production lines and whose origins went back to 1933 – the Messerschmitt Bf 109B-1. That year, Oberstleutnant Wilhelm Wimmer, then head of the RLM's Technical Office, took the somewhat radical decision to allow the struggling aircraft firm Bayerische Flugzeugwerke AG (BFW), owned by Willy Messerschmitt, to enter a forthcoming competition for the design of a new fighter aircraft. Despite being permitted to participate in the competition, BFW was considered by many in the Technical Office, including Wimmer, to be a rank outsider. It was felt that Messerschmitt, whose production lineage was formed of a run of somewhat dubious civilian airliners, possessed no experience in the design of high-speed combat aircraft, and thus had little chance of winning against the more experienced Arado and Heinkel companies.

The small Messerschmitt design team, headed by Dipl.-Ing. Robert Lusser, who had worked previously for Klemm and Heinkel, began work on the new fighter known as the *Verfolgungsjäger* (pursuit fighter) in March 1934. The company intended to power its design with one of the new 20-litre 12-cylinder liquid-cooled inverted-vee inline engines then under development by BMW (BMW 115 or 116) and Junkers (Jumo 210). Messerschmitt ensured that his team employed the same state-of-the-art techniques in structural and aerodynamic form that had been successfully embodied in the company's M 37 – a four-seat touring aircraft to be built as a single-spar, all-metal stressed-skin low-wing monoplane that would eventually emerge as the Bf 108 *Taifun*. The resulting aircraft, which later received the RLM designation 'Bf 109', was very audacious in concept.

Like the Bf 108, the fighter featured all-metal construction, a monocoque fuselage, a cantilever wing with slotted flaps and automatic slots, a fully retractable main undercarriage and an enclosed cockpit with

a hinged canopy. The fuselage was of the smallest possible cross-section, being just large enough to house the 600 hp Jumo 210 that had been selected by the Technical Office for mass-production in preference to the BMW engines.

The first prototype, the Bf 109a (later to be redesignated Bf 109 V1), performed its maiden flight on 28 May 1935. The aircraft was powered by an imported 695 hp Rolls-Royce Kestrel engine because the intended Jumo 210A was not yet available for installation. Apart from some problems with its narrow-tracked and potentially weak undercarriage, which made it difficult to handle on the ground, the Bf 109 proved to be an outstanding aircraft. Its flight performance more than compensated for its landing gear deficiencies.

The evaluation of the competing fighter prototypes began at Rechlin in October 1935, the Bf 109 and Heinkel's He 112 quickly outclassing the Arado and Focke-Wulf contenders. During evaluation trials it was found that the Bf 109, with a top speed of 467 km/h, was 27 km/h faster than the favoured He 112, although the latter had a lower wing loading and better ground handling qualities. The aircraft were so similar in other respects that the Technical Office awarded contracts to both firms for ten prototypes for further testing. Eventually, the Bf 109 was selected as the winner, largely because it was both cheaper and easier to build than the He 112.

The first six examples of the first production model, the aforementioned Bf 109B-1, were completed in December 1936. They subsequently became the first monoplane fighters with fully-enclosed cockpits and retractable undercarriages to enter Luftwaffe service when deliveries to JG 132 *'Richthofen'* commenced in the spring of the following year.

The war in Spain offered the Luftwaffe the perfect opportunity to test the new fighter in operational conditions and, for his part, Wilberg could not get them fast enough so as to solve the problem of the He 51's obsolescence. A small number of Bf 109 prototypes, namely the V3 (Wk-Nr. 760 D-IOQY, fitted with an engine-mounted 20 mm Oerlikon cannon), V4 (the first pre-series production Bf 109 completed as B-01 Wk-Nr. 878 D-IALY, fitted with three 7.92 mm MG 17 machine guns), V5 (B-02 Wk-Nr. 879 D-IEKS, featuring a variable-pitch VDM metal propeller as opposed to the fixed-pitch Schwartz wooden propellers of the other machines) and V6 (B-03 Wk-Nr. 880 D-IHHB, as per the V5) were slated for shipment to the *Legion Condor* and seem to have arrived with VJ/88 (*Versuchsjagdstaffel* – Experimental Fighter Squadron) at Tablada in December 1936.

However, it remains unclear as to whether three or four aircraft were actually shipped out at this time. It is more likely to have been three, and it is possible that the V4 has been mistaken for a Messerschmitt when in fact it was actually the He 112 V4, which is also believed to have been sent to Spain. Certainly, on 30 November, von Richthofen had observed crates with disassembled Bf 109s 'lying around' a harbour, probably Cadiz. Three days later, he bemoaned that 'transport roads from the harbour to the airfield are so blocked up that the crates with the Bf 109, locked inside the wagons for three days now, cannot be brought to the airfield. Everyone has now been notified. Any success likely?'

One of the first disassembled and eagerly-awaited Bf 109s to reach Spain is removed from its numbered shipping crate and steered by a team of Spanish mechanics into a hangar for re-assembly at Tablada airfield in December 1936

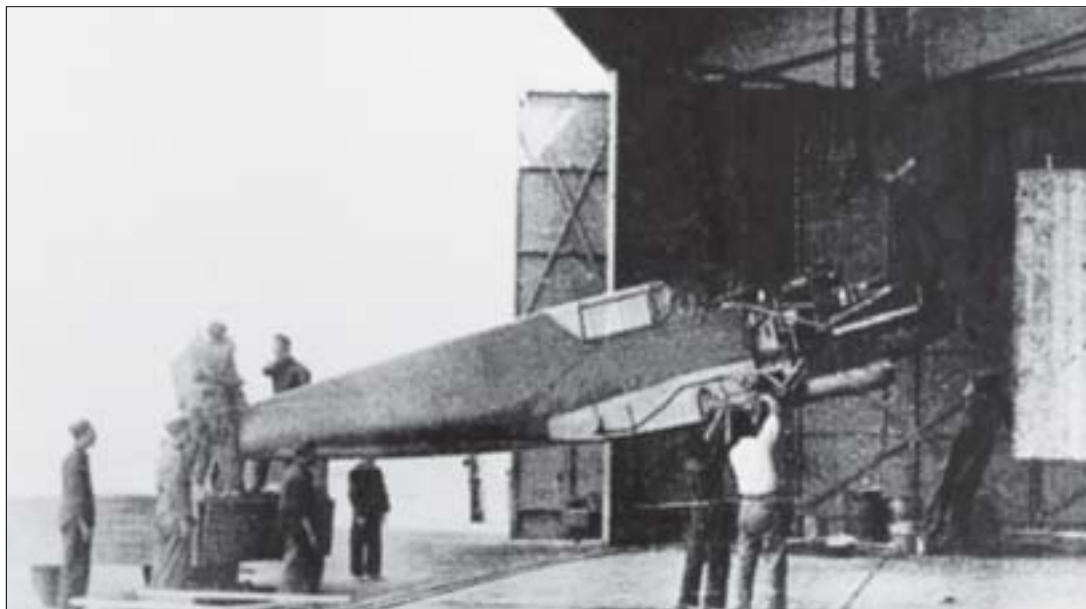


On 5 December, Hauptmann Merhardt requested that two pilots from J/88 be made available for testing the first Messerschmitts, which were expected to be ready within three or four days for local operations over Seville. The pilots selected were Leutnant Trautloft and Unteroffizier Kley.

The fuselage section, cockpit and engine of the Bf 109 is manhandled carefully into the hangar at Tablada. The head of *Versuchs-Kommandos* 88, Oberstleutnant Dr.-Ing. Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen, noted, however, that crates with disassembled Bf 109s were 'lying around' in a Spanish harbour, and that heavily congested roads from the coast to Tablada further delayed the arrival of the first Messerschmitts

Events of 9 December irritated von Richthofen. According to his diary, following a stall, 'Gefreiter Koch' crashed and wrote off a Bf 109. Von Richthofen commented 'It was a mistake to select Koch, an unknown man, and not to have previously demonstrated the aircraft to him'. In reality, this is probably a reference to Unteroffizier Erwin Kley, who is recorded as having destroyed a Bf 109 in a crash on take-off at Tablada. Furthermore, three more Bf 109s that were due to arrive by steamship were found not to have been loaded in Germany.

On 17 December the last of the three Bf 109s at Tablada (V3, V5 and V6) was finally unpacked from its shipping crates.





This Bf 109 prototype, coded 6-1, was photographed at Tablada in December 1936 while being inspected by curious Spanish airmen. The aircraft would be flown for the first time by Oberleutnant Hannes Trautloft on 14 December, and he would apply his personal marking of a large green heart below the cockpit. This emblem would later be taken up by JG 54, which Trautloft would command in World War 2

The Bf 109 would have its baptism of fire far to the south in support of the combined Spanish and Italian advance on Málaga that was planned to reduce a Republican 'bulge' in Nationalist lines along the Andalusian coast. The untrained Republican militia defending the area proved incapable and unwilling to stand up to Nationalist tanks and troops and their Italian allies. Málaga quickly fell, whereupon thousands of suspected Republican

sympathizers were executed, but the Nationalists had failed to cut the road from Madrid to Valencia.

From the first flights in the new Messerschmitt prototype fighter in the skies over Andalusia, which Trautloft had adorned with his distinctive personal emblem of a *Grunherz* (green heart) below the cockpit, he was able to assess its performance and its good and bad points. The veteran fighter pilot prepared many reports for his superiors, including detailed recommendations on how best to improve the aircraft's design so as to make it more suitable for combat operations.

Trautloft's first impressions were that the Jumo 210 engine was difficult to handle, and that the Bf 109 would need a pilot far more qualified than one able to fly the He 51, especially in controlling high-speed turns. The narrow undercarriage was tricky on landing and the aircraft had a dangerous tendency to roll or swing at full power on take-off. Nevertheless, in overall terms, with a comfortable cruising speed of 350 km/h and a maximum speed of 465 km/h, a service ceiling in excess of 8200 m and a range of 690 km, he viewed the fighter extremely favourably and judged it to be a superior combat aircraft when put up against the I-15 and I-16.

On 4 February 1937, von Richthofen noted in his diary;

'I became worried that too few fighters would remain in the region around Madrid, especially since the Italians are also committed in the south. To keep everyone happy, the Lehmann *Staffel* will go there from Zaragoza.'

Thus, early February saw the component *Staffeln* of J/88 dispersed as follows;

- 1.J/88 under Hauptmann Palm at Escalona del Prado (known as the '*Marabu*' *Staffel*)
- 2.J/88 under Hauptmann Lehmann at Almorox (known as the '*Zylinderhut*' *Staffel*)
- 3.J/88 under Hauptmann Roth at Villa del Prado (known as the '*Mickymaus*' *Staffel*)
- 4.J/88 under Oberleutnant Knüppel at León

As early as 4 February however, von Richthofen had intended to disband 4.J/88. 'The aircraft will be flown to Seville for overhaul and transfer to the Spaniards', he wrote. 'Their personnel will be sent home, insofar as they are not needed for new single-seaters'. But this does not seem to have happened immediately.



Tragedy struck on 11 February when Paul Rehahn, a member of the second cadre of pilots to come to Spain, was killed at Càceres flying one of the early Bf 109s (6-2) on a ferry flight to the north. His parachute bag, which had been stowed into a compartment behind his seat and stuffed with dirty laundry, pushed him forward onto the control column when he came in to land. The next day, the *Kapitän* of 1.J/88, Werner Palm, and Hans-Jürgen Hepe were both shot down in flames over Madrid. Although both men were wounded, they were able to use their parachutes to jump to safety, landing in Nationalist territory.

On 24 February von Richthofen noted, 'Inspected Knüppel's outfit. Three Bf 109s are in assembly – will be ready in three days' time. The plan – give Knüppel all the Bf 109s, also the 12 (or nine) that are coming.'

By 2 March, the Chief of Staff's plans for reorganisation and rotation began to start when four of the original 'old hairs', Trautloft, von Houwald, Sawallisch and Klein, were sent back to Germany. On 6 March the *Kette* of He 51s of 2.J/88, which had been based at Talavera for a week, moved back to Villa del Prado, 12.5 km southeast of San Martín de Valdeiglesias. Four days later the *Staffel* was moved again to more permanent facilities at Almorox.

Such was the importance that senior Luftwaffe commanders placed on operational trials that when they finally recognised the quantity, and apparent quality, of the Soviet aircraft in Spain, and following the shipment of the Bf 109 prototypes, they decided that more B-series production examples (known as the *Bruno*) should be sent south. This was done at the expense of fighter units in Germany at a time when the Luftwaffe was attempting to expand. In fact the Bf 109 was crucial to the long-term viability of the *Legion Condor*, and for the development of German air power doctrine. So it was that of the first 30 Bf 109B-1s manufactured, 12 were shipped to Spain.

The aircraft retained the 600 hp Jumo 210 of the V-series prototypes, although some engines could offer 680 hp due to a two-speed supercharger, while one variant incorporated direct fuel injection. Most fighters had the wooden fixed-pitch Schwartz propeller, and some B-1s sent to Spain were fitted with a radio. Armament consisted of a pair of

The Bf 109 V3 photographed at Herrera de Pisuergra, coded 6-3 and adorned with the 'Zylinderhut' emblem of 2.J/88. Powered by a 640 hp Jumo 210A engine, this aircraft was fitted with an engine-mounted 20 mm MG FF cannon and two fuselage-mounted MG 17 machine guns

7.92 mm MG 17s mounted over the engine and a third MG 17 installed between the engine banks to fire through the propeller hub.

The first three Bf 109B-1s were taken on by J/88 on 14 March and, as per von Richthofen's plans in February, assigned to Knüppel, Gödecke and Urban Schlaffer. Soon after, the *Jagdgruppe* moved to Vitoria, and as early as the 17th, von Richthofen noted that 'Seidemann is delighted with the assaults by the *Jagdgruppe* on ground targets'.

On 19 March, as part of another reorganisation, Oberleutnant Günther 'Franz' Lützow assumed command of 2.J/88 at the new northeastern airfield at Vitoria. The *Staffel* was to operate the Bf 109 exclusively, with an initial strength of seven machines, while 1.J/88 under Harro Harder and 3.J/88 under Douglas Pitcairn retained the He 51, with a nominal strength of ten aircraft each. They operated from the new and old northwestern airfields, respectively. In the early morning of 25 March, von Richthofen made an inspection of the airfields, and noted;

'The old airfield is small and very soggy. It is perhaps usable for the He 51s. The newer airfield has a superb concrete runway. It is 900 m long and is good for the Bf 109s and the Italians.'

As per von Richthofen's earlier intentions, 4.J/88 was disbanded at this point.

It seems that there were teething problems with the new Bf 109s. On 19 March, von Richthofen observed, 'The *C-Amt* (Udet) is constantly taking wrong measures because of engine troubles with the Bf 109'. Then later the same day, 'The engine problem with the Bf 109 will finally be put in order. The engineer was dealt with'.

The move to Vitoria was made because the lack of success around Madrid had led Franco, upon prompting from Mola and Sperrle, to change the direction of his offensive and attempt to take the strip of Basque territory along the northern Spanish coast between Gijón and Bilbao. The Nationalists hoped to seize the valuable industrial and mining regions of Vizcaya and Asturias. Franco would deploy the Navarrese Carlists of the *Ejército del Norte*, supported by artillery, the Italian Expeditionary Force and the aircraft of the *Legion Condor*, which Sperrle had assured the Generalísimo would make a crucial contribution. The Nationalists subsequently fought a concerted campaign in bad weather and in difficult terrain.

Air operations were planned by Gen Kindelán, head of the Nationalist Air Force, several senior field commanders and von Richthofen, who tantalised his Spanish colleagues with the prospect of a new tactic of 'close air support' using aircraft for sustained ground-attack to smash the morale of opposing troops. Accordingly, arrangements were made for the continuous and rapid liaison between the headquarters of the Spanish ground forces and the *Legion Condor*. Two hours before

He 51B-1 2-108 shows signs of considerable use while a bowser delivers fresh fuel supplies at an airfield in northern Spain. It is believed that this aircraft was later flown by at least one Spanish Nationalist pilot. The chain over the bird in the fuselage emblem could be a reference to the He 51s' ceaseless, revolving ground-attack operations where the Heinkels became known to the Spanish as '*Cadenas*' (chains)



any attack, the air commanders would inform the ground HQ so that the necessary coordination could take place. It was also agreed at these meetings that attacks would proceed 'without taking into account the civilian population'.

Operations with the He 51 against ground targets by 3.J/88 generated success in daring low-level bombing and strafing attacks in the mountainous terrain. The Spanish came to call the Heinkels '*Cadenas*' (chains) in a reference to their ceaseless revolving line astern tactics. Once their ammunition had been expended, the German pilots felt confident enough to make dummy attacks over enemy trenches. This had a terrifying effect on Republican and Basque soldiers. It seemed as if a role had finally been found for the troublesome Heinkel. To a great extent the campaign in the north in the spring of 1937 *relied* upon air power to blast the enemy's advance lines so as to pave a way for the ground troops.

Indeed, such was the confidence in the way the *Legion Condor* was conducting its operations at this time that von Richthofen noted smugly in his diary, 'We practically lead the entire show, without ourselves being responsible'. And on 28 March, 'For the first time here, I find the whole thing enjoyable! In this position of being an effective, omnipotent Commander-in-Chief, I have the feeling that I am of enormous importance, and I have established effective ground/air command'.

One downside, noted von Richthofen, was that for some reason, 'As usual, the *Kommandeur* of J/88, Hauptmann Merhardt, finds needless grounds to grumble'.

Gradually, however, despite the rough parity in strength of the opposing ground forces, from the spring of 1937 the Nationalist coalition began to gain wide local superiority over Spain despite its numerical inferiority in the air. By comparison, the Republican air forces operated with less cohesion and too defensively, rarely managing to achieve an efficient coordination of their air and ground forces.

The 'Biscay' or 'Vizcaya' offensive in the north commenced on 31 March, and immediately during the morning all three *Staffeln* of J/88 went into action, supporting the Nationalist infantry of the 4th Navarre Brigade with bombing and strafing attacks when it became halted by the enemy lobbing hand-grenades at close quarters. Von Richthofen noted 'J/88 appeared and pinned the enemy down'.

Again and again the Heinkels returned to base to refuel and re-arm before heading back to the battlefield, where they sustained considerable damage from ground fire. Von Richthofen grew angry at the fact that the 4th Brigade had not made ground, complaining to Sperrle. It was the start of many spats between the German and Spanish commanders, with von Richthofen accusing the Spanish of a lack of energy and leadership. Sperrle did his best to smooth ruffled feathers, and over the next few days the He 51s continued a relentless series of fearless, low-level sorties against fortified Basque positions around Murubain, Oleata and Ochandiano.

It was dangerous work. On 1 April, Leutnant August Wilhelm von Blankenagel of 1.J/88 was lost when his He 51 was shot down while making a low-level attack. Blankenagel had been hit in the head and his aircraft crashed into a mountainside, where the wreckage eventually burned up. Another pilot bailed out but landed in friendly territory.

The Basques did not even have sufficient time to leave their trenches and tend to their wounded before the 'Cadenas' renewed their attacks. On 4 April the Nationalists were driving on Mount Monchetegui, von Richthofen noting:

'I ordered new attacks by the Ju 52s, VJ/88 and the Italians on this mountain stronghold. I was lucky in the timing, as the air formations struck simultaneously at the targets. The stronghold turned into a gruesome spectacle of flames and smoke from about 60 tonnes of bombs that fell within two minutes. With the first bombs, the Reds again began to run in thick droves into a forest situated towards their rear, where most of the bombs fell, effecting a horrible slaughter.'

On 6 April the Bf 109 at last earned its first combat laurels when Oberleutnant Lützow, leading a *Kette* from 2.J/88 comprising Hauptmann Lothar von Janson and Feldwebel Franz Heilmayer, shot down one of four I-15s encountered at 1715 hrs northwest of Ochandiano for his own first victory. The enemy pilot bailed out and landed in Nationalist territory – 'an 18-year-old raw beginner on an overland ferry flight' recorded Lützow. Indeed, by now the Republican fighter force in the area had suffered such devastating losses in aircraft, many of which were caused by bombing and strafing attacks on their airfields, that replacement machines were having to be flown in. The Nationalists were in firm control of the skies.

Rain then fell for several days, but the combination of adverse weather and the infrequent appearance of enemy aircraft meant that the German pilots endured an arid spell of combat engagements and aerial victories. On the 12th, 1.J/88 reported ten He 51s on strength, with two unserviceable, 2.J/88 had six Bf 109s, of which five were in Seville and two were unserviceable, and 3.J/88 had ten He 51s and four recently arrived Hs 123 ground-attack biplanes. The spell was broken on the 22nd when Leutnant Günther Radsch and Feldwebel Heilmayer of 2.J/88 each claimed an I-15, one of which was flown by seven-victory Republican ace Capitán Felipe del Río Crespo, who was killed.

Four days later, the *Legion Condor* bombed the Basque town of Guernica as part of its on-going operations to support the advance northwards, and its actions sent shockwaves rippling through the world's media.

The Nationalists had identified Guernica as a choke point, with retreating Republican forces needing to pass through its road intersection in order to reach safer territory. In doing so, they would cross a bridge at Rentaria, but first they would have to pass through Guerricaiz, nine kilometres away. It was here that von Richthofen realised his bombers could annihilate the Republicans.

Oberleutnant Günther 'Franz' Lützow (centre foreground) took command of 2.J/88 on 19 March 1937 and went on to score five victories in Spain. During World War 2 he enjoyed an exceptional career as a *Jagdflieger* and unit commander, reaching 108 confirmed victories in 300 missions, but was killed in action flying an Me 262 with JV 44 on 24 April 1945. Lützow is seen here at Santander in the summer of 1937 along with, from left, Gotthard Handrick, Peter Boddem, Joachim Schlichting (just visible behind Lützow), Walter Ehle, Harro Harder, Erich Woitke and Rolf Pingel



By destroying the Rentaria bridge the defenders would be contained on the wrong side of the Oca River. But that morning (26 April) reconnaissance aircraft from A/88 erroneously reported large enemy forces around Guernica. In fact they were civilians on their way to their usual market. Von Richthofen saw a tactical opportunity to use air power to isolate and destroy these 'reserves', and he obtained permission from Mola's Chief-of-Staff, Coronel Juan Vigón, to strike this new target.

Together with the Italians, the *Legion's* bombers were to attack what were assumed to be 23 battalions of Basque troops on the roads immediately east of Guernica and on its outskirts. They were to also target the Rentaria bridge, while J/88 with A/88 would strafe the roads east of the river to force the defenders into Guerricaiz.

However, communications between von Richthofen's command post and the Nationalist HQ at Burgos seem to have failed, ending in confusion, and an attack was ordered on Guernica itself. K/88 and VB/88 duly despatched 26 bombers, escorted by 16 fighters from 1. and 2.J/88. German bombs struck the bridge, the town centre and an area south of Guernica. A burning olive oil plant caused dense clouds of smoke that only served to confuse later waves of aircraft. As many as 1500 people were reported as having been killed or wounded during the bombing attacks – the true number will never be known, and some victims were strafed by Bf 109s of 2. J/88 as they tried to escape the carnage.

The bridge remained largely unscathed and the bombs missed the assigned targets except for the railway station. A small-arms factory remained untouched, as did the town's two hospitals. But the damage inflicted on Guernica was enough to appal international opinion, and the town held the ignoble distinction of being the first to suffer from a modern 'terror raid'. It became an embarrassment for the Nationalists.

Unworried by such trivialities as world opinion, von Richthofen mechanically gave J/88 'a free rein to attack the roads around Guernica' the very next day. The He 51s flew high sortie numbers during the battle for the heights near Amorebieta and the 200 metre-high Bizcargui, which dominated the surrounding area. Harro Harder's 1. *Staffel* went to work, and as he recalled;

'April 27 – bad weather again. The clouds hang low over the mountains. I manage to make it past Udala with my *Kette* and find good targets on the Durango-Bilbao road. The Reds had apparently not bargained on the famous "motor-vehicle hunters" coming out in this awful weather. They have assembled their vehicles without camouflage. Flying low, we shoot up about 20 motor vehicles. Again and again, we dive beneath the low clouds. The next day we're back at it again. Oberfeldwebel (Karl) Wilfert finds three trucks towing guns. Once again we come across a vehicle column. Bombs on target. A few bursts at the church tower in Durango, where there are reported to be machine gun posts, then I roll over the town at low-level as usual and then head back home over Udala.'

On 30 April Harder flew another six sorties, during which his *Kette* shot up nearly 40 more vehicles.

On 1 May Bilbao was encircled, the so-called 'Ring of Iron' (*Cinturón de Hierro*) around the city being reached six days later. German bombers blasted the Basque positions, sometimes making three sorties a day. Flying



The Heinkel He 112 V9, coded 8-2, undergoes maintenance under the cover of olive trees in Spain. One of only two such aircraft in the *Legion Condor's* inventory (the other is believed to have been either the V3, V4 or V5), the V9 was flown by Oberleutnant Harro Harder during his second tour of duty in Spain. As with his He 51, Harder maintained his penchant for decorating his aircraft with a Swastika. The code prefix '8' was usually carried by captured I-15s, while '5' was normally allocated to the He 112. Some 16 pre-production He 112B-0s were handed over to the Nationalists, all to be flown by Spanish pilots

a Bf 109 as escort to the bombers, Günther Lützow shot down an I-15 on 22 May and another one on the 28th, as did Feldwebel Heinz Braunschweiger. Bad weather then delayed operations after initial gains, but despite stubborn resistance by the poorly equipped Basques, their capital was taken on 19 June.

During these operations against ground troops in the north, another German all-metal, low-wing monoplane fighter prototype that had arrived in Spain in November 1936 made its combat debut.

The He 112, which, as mentioned, had been seen as the main competitor to the Bf 109,

displayed cleaner lines than the Messerschmitt, but it was larger and appreciably heavier due to its more complex structure. Powered by a 680 hp Jumo 210Da engine, the He 112 prototype was intended to be the prototype for the He 112A production machine, and it was armed solely with an experimental engine-mounted 20 mm C/30 L cannon. In December, Leutnant Radusch was assigned especially from J/88 to VJ/88 to test the new aircraft (coded 5-1) at Almorox before handing it over to Unteroffizier Max Schulz of 1.J/88. The latter unit employed 5-1 primarily against Republican armour, with some effect, earning the fighter the nickname '*Dosenöffner*' (Can Opener) for its destruction of three enemy tanks during the advance on Bilbao.

Having captured Bilbao, the Nationalists now prepared for their next great assault over the Cantabrian Hills towards the Republican-held port of Santander. This period was remembered by Hauptmann Gotthardt Handrick, who had won a Gold Medal for the modern pentathlon in the 1936 Berlin Olympics prior to joining *Jagdgruppe* 88 in Spain;

'Bilbao had just fallen when I arrived. I had believed I would be coming into a war-torn region, especially as the Santander offensive was imminent, but it was not so. In Vitoria, Spanish life pulsed just the way it had presumably done even before the war had started. The youth of the town sauntered on the Paseo, and only the large numbers of those in uniform made one aware of the unusual circumstances in which the country found itself. After two days we moved, so as to become operationally ready for the offensive. The *Gruppe* left its airfield *Staffel* by *Staffel*. Our new base of operations was to be Herrera de Pisuergra.

'The maps which were available to us volunteers in Spain at that time were rather poor. The scale was as a rule, 1:1,500,000, and on top of that, the maps were highly unreliable. It was therefore no wonder that on my first flights I never found my way! But one gets used to everything, even inadequate maps. In the end, the whole thing proved to be not so dangerous, for they had significant landmarks which one could easily



memorise, and which assisted with orientation. In addition to that, Spain was blessed with marvellous clear vision which – apart from certain exceptions – exists throughout the country.

'In terms of countryside, Herrera de Pisuergra was not exactly exciting. It lies in a plain. Santander was situated a mere 100 km away (in a straight line by air) from Herrera, due north. What gave the countryside its distinction was dust – in unimaginable quantities! The trucks left behind enormous dust clouds, and on the airfield it didn't look any different.

'Life in our *Gruppe* was thoroughly comradely and pleasant. Very often in the evenings we sat together at a simple supper, talked about the war, and naturally about Germany, about the imminent offensive, and

Mechanics work on the 680 hp Jumo 210 Ea engine of the He 112 V9, which was the second B-series prototype. The Jumo had a maximum speed of 510 km/h at an altitude of 4000 m. The V9 featured armament comprising two 20 mm MG FF wing-mounted cannon and a pair of 7.9 mm MG 17s in the fuselage that were synchronised to fire through the two-bladed propeller



Hauptmann Gotthardt Handrick (second from left), an Olympic celebrity as well as a fighter pilot, won a Gold Medal for the modern pentathlon in the 1936 Berlin Olympics before joining *Jagdgruppe* 88 in Spain. He eventually took over command of the unit from von Merhart in July 1937. Handrick is seen here, possibly at Vitoria, in front of his pristine Bf 109D-1 6-56



no discord disturbed our camaraderie. In terms of flying, Herrera initially offered very little. We were not able to do anything else other than wait, and we had to restrict our flying operations to the bare minimum in order not to betray our airfield. Every take-off stirred up such a great cloud of dust that it could be seen kilometres away.'

Eventually, under pressure from Communist factions and in an attempt to display some form of military initiative to relieve the pressure on the northern front, two Republican army corps numbering 50,000 men under the command of Gen Miaja, supported by 150 aircraft, 128 tanks and 136 pieces of artillery, launched an offensive on 6 July towards the Estremadura region. The success of the attack hinged on the seizing of the village of Brunete, some 30 km west of Madrid. Miaja struck from the north of the El Escorial-Madrid road so as to cut off Nationalist forces from the west and block Franco's reinforcement lines. With little except barbed wire to defend the weakly-held Nationalist positions, Brunete was taken by the Republicans that day.

Gravely worried by this sudden 'bulge' which appeared in a key part of the frontline around Madrid, the Nationalist response to the Republican threat was swift and decisive, and forces were rushed to the area. On 6 July Franco telegraphed Sperrle at Vitoria;

'It is urgent that the Bf 109 fighter is put into action tomorrow at the front from Ávila. I request that you order the transfer from the said airfield.'

Sperrle replied to the Nationalist headquarters at Salamanca that a transfer of individual or specific units of the *Legion* would not be possible – rather he would transfer larger elements of his force to Ávila. Thus, following Franco's request, the Bf 109 *Verfolgungsjäger* of J/88, A/88 and the He 70s of VB/88 were moved to the Brunete sector. In clear blue skies at 0700 hrs, 1. and 2.J/88 hurriedly relocated from Burgos to Escalona del Prado and Ávila, respectively, although one aircraft was forced to return to Burgos with technical problems. No sooner had 2. *Staffel* reached Ávila than all nine of its aircraft were refuelled and sent off again at 1220 hrs as escort for bombers attacking 'designated targets'.

To mark Gotthardt Handrick's return to Germany in September 1938, a commemorative parade was held for the commander of J/88 at La Sénia airfield in Aragón. Here, Handrick addresses the assembled crowd – including the band of the *Legion Condor* – from a podium positioned in front of his Bf 109



The laurel-bedecked nose of Handrick's Bf 109D-1, photographed at La Sénia in September 1938. The white section of the spinner has been decorated with the five Olympic rings and the winning year of 1936, while a placard declaring 'Scheiden tut weh' (Parting is Painful) has been placed over the engine intake. On the other side of the spinner was another set of rings displaying – with misguided optimism – the year '1940?' in the hope of a second Gold Medal in Tokyo



The *Gruppenstab*, together with 3.J/88 had moved, temporarily, to Escalona by 1800 hrs on the 8th, before transferring to Villa del Prado. That day the popular Hauptmann Merhardt relinquished command of the *Jagdgruppe* to Hauptmann Handrick, who recalled the local operating conditions;

'I was able to accommodate my *Gruppenstab* in a nice *Castello*, which lay in a canyon, in the grounds of which a river invited one to bathe. During the period of little rainfall, it was only some 30 m wide and at the most 15 to 30 cm deep, but during the rainy season it swelled enormously. The *Castello* then became cut off from its surroundings. A comrade of mine, Oberleutnant von Gilsa, in trying to swim across at one time, almost came to grief. The *Stabsquartier* and the airfield were situated on the vast edge of the high plateau of Madrid, in Castille. Whoever thinks that the Castillian countryside consists of something especially romantic would be very disappointed in Escalona. It is brown, barren, the soil is arid and in terms of dust, the region could easily compete with Herrera de Pisuega.

'At the airfields, an insane heat raged – between 40-45°C in the shade, so that the work of the groundcrews was not exactly easy. The mechanics worked exclusively in their swimming trunks and protected their heads

Gotthardt Handrick's Bf 109D-1 6-56 at La Sénia in September 1938.

The Nationalist fuselage insignia is superimposed with a Gothic-style 'h' personal marking – the second such variation to be used by Handrick. The aircraft's tail has been marked with two victory bars to denote Handrick's shooting down of an I-15 on 9 September 1937 (unconfirmed) and an I-16 on 18 May 1938

from the scorching heat of the sun with wide-brimmed *sombreros*. During flight our aircraft just could not be kept cool at all. The coolant was at 120°C and the oil clocked up 110°C.

'The *Staffeln* of the *Gruppe* were located some 50 km away from each other. This made communication between the units quite difficult. In this summer of 1937, our activity was made even more difficult by the scorching heat. We normally woke at 0600 hrs, and our nightly sleep was never especially refreshing. During the night, the temperature was "only" around 30°C, and flies and mosquitoes buzzed. We isolated ourselves with mosquito nets and often took to sleeping out in the open, but the nights were never refreshing in and around Escalona.

'On the other hand, the evenings were a little more pleasant. We refreshed ourselves as far as it was possible, by bathing in the river, but unfortunately the water was almost constantly 25-30°C. We ate, but in a careful way, we drank wine, or sometimes the expensive local and highly-regarded beer, when we would plant ourselves in deckchairs in the tolerably cool courtyard of our "castle". Oberleutnant Harder squeezed appealingly at his accordion. In the distance lay burning villages, and clearly recognisable were the contours of the Sierra de Gredos and the Sierra de Guadarrama on the horizon. We were able to make out the defensive searchlights of the Madrid Front, and now and again our night bombers flew over us on their way to the enemy to carry out their attacks.'

In the north, the Messerschmitts had been confronted only by I-15 *Chatos*, and had made little impact in the actions there. At Brunete however, the superiority of the German fighters was suddenly tested against greater numbers of I-16 *Moscas*, which helped give the Republican *Ejército Popular* overwhelming air superiority during the first few days of the offensive. Furthermore, two *Grupos* of SB-2 *Katiuskas* also outnumbered and outclassed their Italo-German equivalents, but they were inferior in bombload capacity.

Around Brunete, some of the most epic air battles of the Spanish Civil War would be fought, involving, on occasion, up to 200 aircraft. 8 July was to be a busy day for J/88, as 2. *Staffel* was deployed as escort for bombers of K/88 and reconnaissance aircraft of A/88 in the Brunete-Villanueva de la Cañada-Escorial areas of the Republican advance. Also, following two previous *Alarmstarts* (at 1100 hrs with two aircraft and at 1110 hrs with three aircraft), six Bf 109s took off at 1217 hrs to escort aircraft from VB/88 that were attacking targets around Brunete, Valdemorillo and on the road from El Escorial to Brunete.

At 1418 hrs and 1805 hrs there were two more *Alarmstarts*, each with a *Kette* of three machines. In the second sortie, close to Aranjuez, three Republican bombers were engaged, and they hastily salvoed their bombs and veered away in a southeasterly direction. A *Kette* from 2.J/88 led by Leutnant Pingel, and comprising Feldwebel Boddem and Unteroffizier Guido Höness, pursued the enemy for 40 km over the front. Pingel reported;

'As we approached the Front close to Madrid, Feldwebel Boddem observed clouds of flak around Aranjuez. I immediately turned in that direction and spotted five machines flying at 3500 m towards Ávila. Because I was blinded by the evening sun, I couldn't make out if they

were Nationalist machines, and I did not order an attack. Then I saw all the aircraft drop their bombs, turn around and make off in a southeasterly direction. Höness got himself into a favourable position to make an attack. I hung back and observed him. After about three minutes the left engine on one machine stopped turning. It then veered to port. Immediately after Höness' last attack I came in and gave the bomber a last burst of fire. The machine plunged vertically, flames spiralling behind both engines. Parachutes were not observed. The pursuit of other bombers had to be given up as the *Kette* was already 40-50 km over the Front.'

At the end of the day's operations, Pingel and Höness would each be credited with the destruction of an SB-2. In fact, such was the intensity of operations that at 1825 hrs another *Alarmstart* order was given to J/88. Finally, at 2025 hrs, five Bf 109s were ordered into the air again, this time as escort to a reconnaissance flight by A/88.

The next day, the *Staffeln* of J/88 were located at Villa del Prado, Almorox and Escalona. A *Vorkommando* (advance detachment) was placed on readiness to move immediately if necessary. On 9 July, J/88 despatched six aircraft at 1128 hrs and another nine at 1935 hrs on escort for operations by A/88 and VB/88. Meanwhile, at 1155 hrs, an *Alarmstart* saw one aircraft take off. In its operations that day, J/88 expended 2217 rounds of ammunition.

Günther Lützow recalled J/88's time at Ávila for a German magazine;

'We had already been stationed some 14 days on the large airfield west of Madrid at Ávila, an old, very high-lying town which was surrounded by a well-preserved thick stone wall. Its shape and silhouette reminded one of a town from the Middle Ages. The focal point of the war was the front at Brunete, which was under pressure from the Reds. All available forces of the *Legion* were gathered together in this sector. Other than ourselves on the airfield, there were also the Italians with a *Gruppe* of Fiats and a German *Aufklärungsstaffel*. I had my old, proven *Staffel* gathered together, but could never have more than eight aircraft *Startklar* at one time, since the modern single-seat fighters are very sensitive and naturally require special maintenance and checks.

'Over the last 14 days we had experienced all sorts of things. It was real war, which we had looked forward to for a long time. We had on average, except for the *Alarmstarts*, sortied three times a day. Each sortie lasted about 90 minutes and always went up to an altitude of 6000-7000 metres. At that time we flew without oxygen, which after a short while we soon bitterly regretted, as flying at high altitude without oxygen makes one extremely tired. We had become somewhat unnerved, for in addition to the purely physical strain of several sorties and *Alarmstarts*, there was the anxiety about the rare opportunities of being able to achieve confirmed kills.

'We constantly had to fight against a three- or four-fold enemy superiority. That meant, that one never had the time to "hang on" to an opponent in the air for a long period of time. One had to see to it that, during the time that our own bombers or reconnaissance aircraft were operating, one kept the enemy at bay and at a distance.'

'The worst were the continual *Alarmstarts*. From the break of dawn until dusk, two pilots had to always sit strapped in to their aircraft. When

the air raid warning service or the forward flak batteries reported enemy aircraft, the *Alarmrotte* had to take off immediately, for otherwise, with our proximity to the front, the enemy could not be prevented from reaching the bombing zone. Everywhere, the extremely bitter fighting carried out by both sides naturally resulted in a certain amount of wariness, and it thus often happened that the warning service reported our own aircraft as those of the enemy, so that our *Alarmrotte* took off in vain. Such fruitless take-offs didn't do anything to comfort the state of our nerves. A state of over-excited nervousness very soon set in. Everyone grumbled at the slightest excuse and even took it out on his comrades when something didn't go right. Mostly, a brief glance or a word of reprimand from me was sufficient to calm the men down.'

Lützow also recalled the events of 7 July at Ávila;

'We were sitting cheerfully beneath our awning directly next to our fighters when we heard the noise of aircraft to the south of the airfield. It must have been several. In any case, there was a real drone. And then we caught sight of them. They flew past, south of the airfield. They looked like Italian Savoias that were on their way home. Suddenly, they turned towards the airfield and flew directly at us. I raised my binoculars, but immediately put them down again. They were, in fact, Savoias – we could make out the national insignia with the naked eye. They were flying together in formation, not very high, about 1500 m over the airfield. We counted ten aircraft.

'I had already turned myself away when someone shouted, "*They're dropping bombs!*" I turned around and thought, "*But that's impossible*". Then I soon saw how dark specks detached themselves and at ever faster speed came at us. I was just able to shout, "*Everyone in the trenches!*", when the first bombs impacted. I saw my mechanics run to the trenches. Some of them didn't get that far and laid themselves flat out half-way. I also threw myself flat to the ground. I was filled with unconscious rage. I clenched my fists.

'Their bombs were well placed, in the middle of the airfield. But our aircraft were parked at the edge of the field, and thus we got away with it, once more, unharmed. My two take-off-ready pilots had kept their nerve. Their loyal mechanics had also stayed with their aircraft, and with furious strength had gotten the engines going. But what use was that? Although they took off between the bomb craters right after the bombing, they were unable to catch up on the enemy's lead. The attack had come as such a surprise. Nobody had thought it possible that the Reds would adopt such a mean trick. They were French Potez bombers which, in reality, resembled the Italian Savoias with their markings. They were taken to be Nationalist aircraft.

'The consequence was that from that day on, the air raid warning service and the other reporting people did an about-turn once and for all, and for every aircraft that carried Nationalist insignia they assumed it to be a camouflaged Red bomber. I must say that after this incident we were no longer sure of our aircraft recognition anymore. Things had suddenly become more complicated.'

On 12 July Leutnant Pingel shot down an SB-2 and an escorting *Rata*, while Unteroffiziere Adolf Buhl and Peter Boddem each claimed a *Rata*. The next day Boddem struck again, shooting down the I-16 flown by

American volunteer pilot Harold Dahl in the course of an hour-long air battle which saw Feldwebel Braunschweiger also account for a *Rata* while flying a Bf 109 coded 6-13 – a machine which his superstitious comrades were reluctant to fly. Braunschweiger went on to fly 6-13 for his tour of duty in Spain, which saw him score three victories in total. Pingel claimed another I-16 near Fuenlabrada on the 16th, but while the Bf 109s were in action their base at Ávila was again attacked by SB-2s. At dawn the next day, eight Bf 109s of 2.J/88 escorted VB/88 as it attacked enemy positions at Alcalá. Lützow and Leutnant Heinrich Brücker misjudged their positions in the air and lost a chance to shoot down a pair of I-16s.

On 18 July – a day during which surviving German records describe the heat as being ‘unbearable’ – the Nationalists counter-attacked, supported by He 111s and Bf 109Bs of the *Legion Condor*, which undertook ground-strafting missions in the wake of the bombers. Gotthard Handrick made a grim observation;

‘The success of our low-level attacks was quite considerable. Spanish observers reported that on one occasion following our low-level attacks on a 150 m-long stretch of foxholes, 100 Red Spaniards had been taken care of by our machine guns. It was possible to make this determination because immediately after our attack the foxholes were taken by Nationalist Spanish infantry.’

Some operations demanded of the German fighters during this battle were bordering on suicidal, as Handrick described;

‘One day an enquiry came in from the *Führungsstab* as to whether we would be able to divert fire from the heavy enemy flak onto ourselves at a particular sector of the Front for a period of 10 to 15 minutes. In this sector, heavy bombers – Ju 52s – were to be deployed in order to plaster particular enemy positions with bombs. The positions were very difficult to make out from the air, hence the bombers had to fly as low as possible, and in addition had to remain undetected by the anti-aircraft defences in order to be able to carry out their task.

‘I held a *Kommandeur’s* meeting. My *Staffeln* made themselves *Startklar*. The positions of the enemy flak were known to us, hence our

Unteroffizier Wilhelm Staege of 2.J/88 in his Bf 109B-2, coded 6-30, with engine running at Alar del Rey in the summer of 1937. Staege would suffer a landing accident in this aircraft when it cart-wheeled and ended up on its back. He was removed relatively unhurt from the scene of the crash. Staege would claim three victories in Spain



approach flights presented no problems. We took off. Above us flew the heavy bombers. The flak naturally fired away – it consisted of two or three batteries – initially at us, and we did our best to silence them. The gun emplacements, however, were embedded well, and it was not at all easy to hit them. I saw for myself that my bombs impacted directly next to the flak guns, but they continued to fire uninterruptedly.

‘In accordance with instructions, we held the enemy flak at bay for the predetermined length of time and then returned home. Even though we had not achieved any visible success by our attack, we had nevertheless carried out our task, as the bombers had returned without having suffered a single hit. It would appear that the guns were unable to divert themselves from us and take on the bombers as their targets, although we were only able to work with 10 kg bombs and machine guns.’

In his account, Handrick omits to mention that such missions meant that there was, by this stage of the war, hardly a He 51 or Bf 109 in J/88 that had not sustained some form of battle damage. ‘I have to express a particular message of thanks to our groundcrews’, Handrick recorded. ‘The boys were fantastic. When we returned home from our flights, which we made wearing only our shirts and shorts due to the heat, and fell dead tired into a place of shade, the groundcrews worked to bring together all available manpower so as to make the aircraft ready for flight once again in the shortest possible time’.

With the Bf 109s beginning to gain air superiority wherever they operated, and increasing their toll on the enemy, more German pilots were edging their way to becoming *experten*, but it was not always easy, as Günther Lützow testified;

‘The battles on the Brunete Front had reached their zenith. Despite our air superiority, the Red bombers attacked again and again. I was on my way home one day after a long cruise along the Front over Talavera, Aranjuez, Madrid and Escorial when I saw clouds of flak over the airfield. My eyes were popping out in front of my head as I strained to see, but I could not make out any enemy aircraft. I looked at the clock and determined that I had already been flying for 70 minutes. I therefore couldn’t engage in a long search.

‘Suddenly, to port and somewhat lower appeared four Martin bombers which – “tails up” – were heading in the direction of Madrid. So these must have been the ones which our flak had been firing at. I thought for just a moment, “Should I attack, or is there no point?” My fuel gauge showed only a few litres left. “But why let such a ‘tasty roast’ get away?” I slewed the aircraft round, activated my gunsight and weapons and began my pursuit. At full power, I chased after the Martin bombers. From a great range I opened fire, so that in the short time I had available I could make full use of my ammunition. The stupid thing was the bombers flew directly into the sun, so that I only had them as weak silhouettes in front of me. Much to my bad luck, the bulb of my *Reflexvisier* had also burned through, which left me without any target-aiming device. I was only able to take a bead over the engine cowlings, and had to leave it to fate as to whether I hit something or not.

‘As I figured, I hit nothing! Of course I fired like a madman, uninterruptedly, but before I could get close to the last of the four bombers, the barrels of my machine guns ran so hot that simultaneously

all three of them jammed. I cursed and hung on to the enemy's rear at a range of 30 m, frantically recharging my weapons. The enemy air gunner took advantage of the opportunity and fired like mad at me, but fortunately he was so excited that he didn't hit anything. I now had to decide. Either I broke off the fight – and this I had to do if I were to return in good time to my airfield – or else I could try to clear the jam in my machine guns and attempt to shoot him down. I then had to reckon with having to make an emergency landing due to a lack of fuel. In this mountainous terrain that would be a hairy thing to do.

'As at that time we had only relatively few aircraft available, I decided to break off the encounter and return to the airfield. With heavy heart I departed from my victim. I didn't want to be a hero, but as a *Staffelführer* I naturally bore responsibility for the aircraft under my care. Over my own homeland I would perhaps have acted differently, for the destruction of the enemy is to be placed before the safety of one's own aircraft. In this case, however, I would have had to reckon with immediate dismissal for having smashed up my own machine. Here, the circumstances were different. A small group of volunteer fighters with limited means against a tremendous superiority in personnel and matériel.

'What made us different from our opponent was the quality of our pilots and our aircraft. With our trust in this superiority, we went into every battle, and this trust caused us to also think more of victory than of death.

'When I landed at Ávila, I noticed that the *Alarm* aircraft had taken off. They had taken up the chase of the Red bombers that I had just encountered. One of them soon returned after he had lost contact with them, but the other, Leutnant Boddem, had chased them far into Red territory and had in fact shot one of them down shortly before it landed. When he reported his victory to me, I felt a stab of regret. This man's actions had been proved right by his success, but I knew that I too had also been right, despite my lack of success.'

Following the end of the first mission on 21 July, Lützow reported that in 2.J/88, '6-9 has to go to Burgos, the transmitter in 6-15 has been shot, 6-13 has had it, 6-9 is unserviceable and 6-10 is on patrol. I have only three aircraft ready for the second mission at 1600 hrs'.

On the ground, Republican insistence on reducing stubborn pockets of resistance rather than bypassing them allowed the Nationalists to bring up reserves at Brunete and to counterattack. In this regard, He 51s were still heavily committed to the ground-support role, and as such suffered much damage. The biplanes frequently approached enemy positions in waves of nine aircraft flying line abreast, almost wingtip-to-wingtip, each carrying six 10 kg fragmentation bombs and dropping them simultaneously. The resulting carnage quickly sapped the morale of the surviving troops. So effective was the onslaught that by the time the Heinkels completed their runs, the attacking Nationalist troops were within hand grenade range of the Republican defenders.

On 12 July, Feldwebel Höness was shot down and his Messerschmitt plunged into the ground from 2500 m near Villarverde, possibly the victim of an American volunteer. Höness had shot down a pair of Polikarpov R-Z *Natacha* biplanes earlier in the day. On the 24th, Leutnant Ernst von Reuter of 1.J/88 was lost in a He 51 during one of

three ground-attack missions against enemy flak positions near Brunete. Leutnant Galland made his combat debut during one of these flights. Harro Harder recalled;

‘We were greeted by a real display of fireworks. Shells burst beside, above and below us, sometimes almost right in our machines. We went over to a low-level attack and were met by intense 20 mm fire from every direction. Everywhere one looked there were He 51s dancing and attacking through the flak. The battle lasted about eight minutes, until we had dropped all our bombs. Although we had almost no ammunition or bombs, we so shook the Red infantry that they left their positions and ran in headlong flight.’

Galland recorded;

‘We flew in close formation very low up the valleys, approaching the enemy position from the rear. At a sign, the bombs were simultaneously released and our load went down in a cluster. We called this “the little man’s bomb-carpet”.’

Bad news came with the crash of He 112 V 5-1 at Escalona on 19 July. Although Unteroffizier Schulz managed to belly-land the aircraft, the fuselage broke on impact and it was written off. Schulz escaped alive, but bit through his tongue on landing. That same day a Bf 109 was destroyed when Unteroffizier Norbert Flegel was forced to crash-land following an engine failure.

A week after the counter-attack at Brunete, and four months after *Legion Condor* veteran Hannes Trautloft had returned from Spain (during which time he had written a book on his experiences there), he joined the winning three-aircraft team in the Alpine formation speed competition at the 4th International Flying Meeting held at Zurich-Dübendorf between 23 July and 1 August 1937. Six Bf 109 prototypes were also included in the German team, this being the first time that the aircraft had been shown to the public, apart from a brief prior appearance at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

The Bf 109 proved to be an outstanding success at Zurich, winning four first prizes for climbing and diving, for speed, in an *Alpenflug* (with the V8 piloted by Major Seidemann, who would also serve with the *Legion*) and for a team *Alpenflug*. The competing foreign teams were totally outclassed by the Bf 109, and its performance came as something of an eye-opener to both the British and French.

In a war environment, the Messerschmitt fighter was also performing well. As Trautloft and his colleagues were impressing the world at Zurich, Feldwebel Boddem shot down I-16s on 21 and 25 July for his third and fourth victories in Spain.

Although Republican forces claimed Brunete as a victory, the horrific scale of the battle is

Oberleutnant Adolf Galland, seen here sitting in shorts and a tunic jacket to the left of the photograph at 3.J/88’s dispersal at Zaragoza-Sanjurjo, first flew in Spain in July 1937 during operations in the Brunete area. He would go on to complete many low-level ground-attack missions in the He 51, and was appointed *Kapitän* of 3. *Staffel* on 27 July 1937 – a position he held until 24 May 1938, when he handed over to Werner Mölders. His daredevil flying earned him the Diamonds to the Spanish Cross in Gold



reflected in the high losses and casualties sustained, totalling some 25,000 men, as well as more than 100 aircraft and a similar number of artillery pieces destroyed, for an insignificant gain of 50 square kilometres. Brunete was a clear setback for the Republic. By comparison, the Nationalists had lost 10,000 men and 23 aircraft.

By the end of July 1937, the fighter *Staffeln* of the *Legion Condor* had been accredited with the confirmed destruction of 59 enemy aircraft, with 12 more unconfirmed. It was true that a small number of

Jagdflieger were increasing their personal scores, but there was still little sign of the lethality that would be demonstrated by these men as *experten* in the campaigns of the Luftwaffe that lay ahead in the coming World War. Aircraft had proved disappointing in combat, conditions in Spain were often difficult and primitive, for much of the time the odds had been against them and firm tactics, particularly with the Bf 109, had still to be defined. Nevertheless, through determination and skill the pendulum of air superiority had slowly swung in J/88's favour.

At the end of July, the highest-scoring fighter ace was Herwig Knüppel with seven confirmed victories, while in second place with six was Kraft Eberhardt, who had been lost over Madrid in November the previous year. Hannes Trautloft, Otto-Heinrich *Freiherr* von Houwald and Rolf Pingel each had five kills to their name, while the promising, and more recent arrival in Spain, Peter Boddem had been accredited with four enemy aircraft destroyed. Finally, Guido Höness, who was lost in July, had been accredited with three. These seven pilots had accounted for well over half of the *Legion Condor's* confirmed fighter claims since the commencement of operations. Analysis of their successes showed that



An early Bf 109, coded 6-4, moves out from its shaded dispersal. This aircraft was probably one of the first B-1s to reach Spain

Initially, Adolf Galland was assigned the He 51 coded 2-10, which he flew for his first ground-attack sorties with 3.J/88. In what was a relatively common occurrence, however, upon returning from one such sortie his Heinkel flipped over onto its back while moving across the rough field. Apparently, he was unhurt. Note a second Heinkel on its nose in the background . . .





... and it was not just the He 51s which suffered from this problem. Here, Bf 109B 6-12 lies on its back having suffered a crash-landing at Santander with Unteroffizier Hermann Stange of 2.J/88 at the controls in late 1937. Stange would be credited with three aerial victories in Spain – all enemy fighters, the last an I-15 on 19 February 1938

of the total, 42 were fighters (the highest losses being inflicted against I-16s – 13 – although 12 I-15s were shot down as well), with the rest comprised of bombers and fighter-bomber/reconnaissance aircraft.

With the defeat of the Republican offensive at Brunete and the return of some stability to the Madrid sector, the Nationalists were able to resume operations in the north, aimed at capturing what remained of Republican territory in the coastal region west of Bilbao. The target was the port of Santander, followed by an advance into Asturias and the relief of Oviedo. Sperrle and von Richthofen had been concerned that Franco, faced with the hostile terrain that lay ahead in the north, would defer an attack there in favour of resting on what had been achieved thus far.

Impatient for success, and an end to operations, the Germans found an ally in the Spanish Chief of Staff, Col Suerodíaz Vigón, and jointly they convinced the Generalísimo to continue. On 26 July, von Richthofen noted in his diary;

'My proposal is accepted. The *Legion Condor* will operate here for another three days before relocating to the north. It will then have one week's rest. From 7 August, we will again be ready to conduct operations. Preparatory orders issued. Tomorrow, the *Verband* leaders will be notified. I shall soon go to the north to Vigón and others.'

Three days later, von Richthofen recorded gruffly;

'Packed my things. Was at the airfield, where disobedience reigns. Half of J/88 have already relocated themselves against orders. The rest have already installed reserve fuel tanks and are only half-ready for operations (without bombs).'

In its usual unorthodox, somewhat irregular and mildly chaotic manner, *Jagdgruppe* 88 prepared itself for its next campaign back in the north.

LESSONS FROM COMBAT

After its first year of operations in Spain, the *Legion Condor* was able to reach few conclusions on the tactical employment of its fighters, which had three fundamental missions – firstly, the defence of the Nationalist frontlines and hinterland against enemy air attack; secondly, the provision of fighter escort to the *Legion's* bomber *Staffeln*; and thirdly, the carrying out of low-level strafing and bombing attacks in support of friendly ground forces.

As has been seen, it was clearly evident that the most suitable role for the He 51 that had emerged through combat deployment was as a ground-support aircraft, and in such missions the Heinkel had proved relatively reliable and robust. In the case of the Bf 109, lessons had been learned. Despite the aircraft's undoubted technological advantages, the effectiveness of J/88 following the unit's conversion to the Messerschmitt had increased only marginally, primarily because Republican pilots consistently avoided combat with the superior German fighter wherever possible. Any engagements of purpose that did occur took place well behind enemy lines.

In terms of the air superiority mission, certainly, by the autumn of 1937, the Bf 109 had achieved superiority over the battlefronts. However, although the 'Red' air force deployed its relatively few bombers against targets located on, or very close to, the frontlines, there was usually very little chance that J/88 could provide an effective defence, or deterrent. This was because the period of time between the observation posts along the front reporting the approach of enemy bombers and the point at which those aircraft actually dropped their bombs amounted to no more than eight minutes at most. This was nowhere near enough time – even for an '*Alarm Rotte*' – to scramble, fly to the target zone and make an interception, or a pursuit.

However, in an echo of the German fighter tactics used in World War 1, this problem was eventually solved by continually deploying up to five Bf 109s over a sector of front in order to maintain surveillance. This system frequently resulted in J/88 being able to use a relatively small number of fighters with which to attack and scatter a Republican bomber formation on its way to a frontline target. Because of this, the 'Reds' were forced to release their bombs over their own

The elegant design of the He 51 is seen to advantage here as an example of the type taxies across an airfield in Spain. The reality was, however, that by mid-1937 it was clearly evident that in the air superiority role, Heinkel's biplane fighter had been outclassed. Its redemption lay in ground-attack missions, which the aircraft performed relatively reliably, thanks to its robust construction, through to 1939





territory (both a waste and dangerous), before turning and returning home as fast as they could. Any Republican fighter escorts would invariably dive to a low altitude and make their way back to their bases singly. It was observed that this behaviour occurred even when the Republicans put on a show of strength with a formation of 50+ fighters.

As the demoralising effect of the Bf 109 upon the enemy became apparent, *Legion* commanders grew increasingly confident and ordered raids by K/88 against targets deeper and deeper into enemy territory – as long as the bombers were escorted by Messerschmitts. Republican fighters would appear in an attempt to intercept, but as soon as they saw Bf 109s few would push through with an attack.

Thus it was, in reality, that few new radical findings had emerged on the employment or performance of the Bf 109 by the second half of 1937, other than that it was necessary to maintain an efficient aircraft reporting network. Fighters engaged in defence operations over the frontline should also be based as close as practically possible to the frontline – this was a prerequisite that the *Legion Condor* always endeavoured to fulfil.

What the superiority of the Bf 109 told the Germans was that a fighter only marginally inferior to those of the enemy would prove easy prey for the latter. Emphasis in future fighter design would have to be placed on speed and rate of climb, and in a scenario where two sides faced each other on such equal terms, it would be superior training and pilot morale that would be the deciding factors.

In the area of armament, there were few conclusions to reach. The Germans and the Republicans fought with weapons that were roughly comparable and, despite the heat and the dust in Spain, the MG 17 had proved reliable and efficient. There were no complaints from either pilot or armourer.

One area where experience – and thus evaluation – was lacking was in nocturnal fighter operations, since the Republicans did not fly such missions.

With regard to fighter escort, the requirement was somewhat more challenging. Firstly, in 1936 and the first half of 1937, most of K/88 operated the Ju 52/3m as a bomber. The Junkers tri-motor was relatively

Probably flown by Oberleutnant Günther Lützow, commander of 2.J/88, Bf 109B-1 6-10 patrols over Spain. This aircraft joined the *Legion Condor* in March 1937 and was first flown by Unteroffizier Ernst Mratzek of VJ/88. It is seen here in formation with Bf 109 6-14, which was taken on strength at the same time. Initially tested by Oberleutnant Otto-Hans Winterer of VJ/88, the fighter was subsequently assigned to 2.J/88 and flown by Unteroffizier Harbach, who was shot down in it in the Brunete area on 18 July 1937. Harbach was able to bail out and land in friendly territory

slow and poorly armed for self-defence, which in turn meant that it could only operate in daytime, and strike at targets located in the enemy rear areas when a fighter escort was provided. Secondly, neither fighter nor bomber pilots had had much experience in locating rendezvous points at a given time. Finally, for most of the time J/88's resources were too meagre to provide effective protection.

Air-to-air communications were effectively non-existent as well, and it was extremely difficult and tiring for the pilots of the Bf 109s to maintain cohesive formation with the lumbering Junkers, although whenever possible the *Jagdflieger* would ensure that they would remain with their charges until they had crossed the frontline into enemy territory. In cases where a target was close to the frontline, the fighters would try to remain with the bombers during the actual bombardment.

Later, in order to simplify the rendezvous problem, aircraft of VB/88 and K/88 were routed over the airfields of J/88 whenever weather and range permitted. Eventually, operations with the Ju 52/3m were discontinued because they became unviable, except in pressing situations. However, it was these very shortcomings that helped to enlighten the *Legion's* commanders as to the tactical interaction between the bomber and the Republican air defences, and thus what steps would be needed to prevent losses in future.

In truth, the Bf 109B with its relatively limited endurance of 85 minutes at most, was not an ideal escort fighter. Experience in Spain did help to hasten the development of the Bf 109D, which enjoyed an endurance of 125 minutes and was thus much 'friendlier' as an escort, but examples did not reach Spain until 1938.

However, the conclusions drawn by the men flying fighter and bomber missions over Spain – including the need for flights of fighters to relieve one another when escorting a bomber formation until it had

Three He 51s join up in close formation for the benefit of the photographer during a patrol over Spain. The nearest aircraft, coded 2-63, has been marked with an unusual white cross just above its segmented spinner. The aircraft also carries the standard 170-litre drop tank which, although extending range, was highly vulnerable to ground fire during low-level attack missions





completed its mission and was back over home territory – were not heeded by senior Luftwaffe leaders in Germany. They instead held on to the misguided belief that a bomber unit flying in close, disciplined formation would be perfectly able to defend itself and not require an escort. Yet even when examples of the brand new He 111 began to equip 1.K/88 from mid-1937, escorts could not be dispensed with entirely.

The air war in Spain would be fought on relatively equal terms between the Nationalists, who would field approximately 1300 aircraft during the conflict, and the Republicans, who could call upon approximately 1500. Neither side would enjoy a clear, qualitative advantage. The Republican air arm, however, placed its emphasis on fighters, and in the first year of the war enjoyed numerical superiority. One reason for this was that the heavy pressure exerted upon the Republicans by strong Nationalist bomber attacks forced them into a defensive position, and fighter pilots could, in broad terms, be trained more quickly than bomber crews.

Generally, on the occasions when Republican fighters did press home an attack on escorted German bombers, they attacked both bombers and fighters indiscriminately, and in a frenzied manner. The more determined 'Red' pilots were known to be eager to attack, often approaching large formations, but it was very rare for them to pursue their quarry across the frontlines into Nationalist territory. Ordered primarily to ward off Nationalist attacks, they never embraced the highly effective German *freie Jagd* (free hunt) concept.

Republican fighter bases were well camouflaged, and the Germans were often unable to identify an airfield, or even the general area, from

Working in the searing heat of a burning Spanish sun, German mechanics prepare to refit the spinner over the propeller boss of a Bf 109B-2. The first Messerschmitts that went to Spain were not fitted with radio equipment, although this became standard in later variants

which 'Red' fighters were operating. During the battles around Madrid, the *Legion* had little idea where Republican fighters were based until a Bf 109 pilot happened to observe them taking off from within the city itself. However, the Republican practice of frequently changing airfields had a detrimental effect in that many fighters were lost in crash-landings or suffered from irregular maintenance.

In August, with the resumption of operations in the north, the three *Staffeln* of J/88 moved to Herrera and Alar del Rey, which was declared '*Arbeitsfähig*' (ready for work) for Bf 109s during the first few days of the month. At this time, Harder's 1.J/88 and 3.J/88, now under the command of recently-promoted Oberleutnant Galland, possessed a total of nine Bf 109s and 18 He 51s, respectively. The advance on Santander began on the 8th with air operations focused on attacking the Reinosa sector to the southwest. In a well-used pattern, Nationalist artillery and Navarrese troops, backed up by low-level attacks from the air, struck the enemy line, while German bombers, escorted by Bf 109s, flew deep into Republican territory. He 51s again flew continuous attacks on road and rail targets, as well as against the Santandaristas and their disillusioned Basque allies, who were now homeless.

1. *Staffel* moved to the forward airfield at Orzalez on 18 August. Four days earlier, 2.J/88, operating refurbished Bf 109s from Calahorra, stood at *Startbereit*. After flying an escort mission for K/88, it later operated together with the He 51s in attacking troop positions on roads in the area south of Reinosa. Gotthard Handrick, commander of J/88, recalled; 'Around the middle of August the Nationalist Spaniards pushed ahead in three columns with a considerable amount of artillery, munitions and armoured cars west of Santander to the coast of the Bay of Biscay. The *Rojos* defended themselves desperately, and in this hilly and occasionally mountainous region, there resulted continuous and fierce fighting for roads and high-lying features. For us "low-flyers", an extensive field of activity offered itself. We were deployed to attack the enemy positions, which commanded the heights and the roads, and naturally the roads themselves, which ran along beneath these heights. The mountain positions were strongly and very well laid out, making them very difficult



He 51s seen in a typical forward operational setting partially concealed amidst olive trees. These machines belong to the reformed 4.J/88, and they were photographed in 1938, by which time the unit's aircraft were carrying the 'Pik-As' (Ace of Spades) emblem

He 51s clustered on an airfield in northern Spain in the autumn of 1937. By this stage of the war, most He 51s were finished in darker patterns of camouflage, although they still carried large Nationalist identification markings on wing and rudder surfaces



to attack with machine guns and bombs. It was at times, therefore, impossible for us to ease the work of the ground troops in the way we would have wished. Nevertheless, we were successful, even if in the end only slow progress was made.

'The Nationalist advance had to deal not only with the natural hindrances of the terrain, but also the fact that many of the roads passed over numerous bridges. The *Rojos* had not neglected to blow up every bridge that they were unable to hold. We therefore often received the special task of hindering the blowing up of some bridge or other, forcing the Reds to call a halt to proceedings until the Nationalist infantry had been brought up. We would loiter over these previously selected bridges and allow nobody to approach them. Our bombs and machine guns could, when the defences were not too strong, mostly isolate them.

'From the air, we could then observe how our infantry worked their way towards them. When we saw the forward infantry patrols advance and take possession of the bridges during the course of the day, we knew we had thus fulfilled our task. If, however, nightfall came before Nationalist troops arrived, the bridge usually had to be given up as it then became impossible for us to recognise enemy demolition patrols from the air and attack them.'

2.J/88 increased its reputation as a squadron of *experten* when, on 17 August, three more enemy aircraft were destroyed in operations against bombers in the Santander sector. Two of them (a *Chato* and a *Rata*) fell to Feldwebel Boddem. That same day He 51s attacked entrenched Republican positions east of Caneda, to the north of Reinos. Forty-eight hours earlier, Leutnant Edgar Rempel had opened his account with the confirmed destruction of an I-16 escort that was seen to go down in flames during an attack on enemy bombers – the first such mission since the commencement of operations against Santander.

Another three aircraft were shot down on the 18th, one, an I-15 over Santander, giving Boddem his eighth victory (all scored in just over a month), while another was credited to Lützow. On the 22nd three more *Ratas* went down under the guns of Bf 109s, the victors being from 2.J/88 – these successes took Lützow's tally to five, Pingel's to six and Flegel's to three. All three pilots had been escorting bombers. By the 23rd, Italian troops were in rifle range of Santander. At the same time 1.J/88 had begun converting to the Bf 109B, Harro Harder claiming its first kill with the type, over an SB-2, on 27 August.

Two days earlier, the He 51 *Ketten* of J/88 had undertaken ground-attack operations against fortified 'Red' positions north and northwest of Torrelavega, while the Bf 109s again escorted K/88, before moving to the airfield at Gijón. From here they also covered the operations of A/88 east and west of Santander, which fell on 25 August

A cheerful Leutnant Josef Fözö of 3.J/88 walks away from his Bf 109D 6-16 at La Sénia while mechanics attend to the aircraft. 'Joschko' Fözö, a Viennese, would serve as *Kommandeur* of II./JG 51 during the first half of 1941 and be awarded the Knight's Cross on 2 July that year, having scored 22 victories



after just two weeks of fighting. Some 50,000 Republican troops and a large amount of war matériel duly fell into Nationalist hands.

However, while Nationalist troops concentrated on mopping up operations, the enemy gathered 80,000 men at Belchite, south of Zaragoza, for a full-scale attack. Some of their best units, including four International Brigades, formed up into the Army of the East under Gen Pozas. The attack, designed to strike at the thinly-held Nationalist line north of Teruel, would then cross hundreds of kilometres to the French border, capturing the main rail junction at Zaragoza and securing all of Aragón for the Republic along the way. By 26 August Zaragoza was seriously threatened, and the He 51s of 3.J/88, bearing the distinctive *Mickey Mouse* cartoon character on their sides (introduced by Pitcairn's mechanics, and not by Galland as often described), were rushed to the area and heavily committed. Galland recalled that the frequent relocations endured by J/88 at this time seemed 'quite without plan or purpose'.

The 26th also saw the *Legion Condor* commence operations against Asturias when bombers (escorted by Bf 109s from 1. and 2.J/88) attacked ships in Gijon harbour. Three freighters were set on fire, and in an air battle over the town Oberfeldwebel Seiler shot down a 'Curtiss'. The *Aufklärungsstaffel* also attacked the harbour with bombs. Later that same day elements of J/88 moved into Pontejos, due west of Santander.

Again, however, stubborn Nationalist stands at places like Belchite preoccupied Republican attentions, allowing the Nationalists to build up counter-forces. A disastrous attack by Republican armour at Fuentes del Ebro cost precious tanks, including many new BT-5s. Capable in defence, the Republic had still not managed to undertake a successful offensive, and by 9 September the drive to Zaragoza had petered out.

Nine days earlier, on 1 September, Franco had launched his drive into Asturias with the aim of taking its capital city, Gijon, and overrunning



The hills around La Sénia form a dramatic backdrop for four Bf 109s from J/88. Nearest to the camera is Bf 109C 6-49, while next to it is Leutnant Otto Bertram's 6-82 of 3.J/88 and then 6-6, an early Bf 109B flown by Leutnant Urban Schlaffer and Feldwebel Herbert Ihlefeld. This aircraft crashed on take-off on 25 July 1938 with Leutnant Franz Jaenisch at the controls

Bf 109B 6-12 crashed on take-off at Santander-West airfield while being flown by Unteroffizier Hermann Stange of 2.J/88. The aircraft is finished in the typical style and markings of the *Legion Condor*, and is adorned with the 'Zylinderhut' emblem of 2. *Staffel*





This He 51B has had large white Nationalist crosses applied to its lower wing surfaces, and the wings have the white tips common to many of the Heinkels in Spain

Oberleutnant Adolf Galland, commander of 3.J/88, sits in the cockpit of his He 51B-1 2-78, which bore a *Mickey Mouse* cartoon figure just forward of the cockpit. Although adopted by Galland as a 'personal' emblem, the Disney character had in fact been introduced by Douglas Pitcairn's mechanics. The He 51 also had a Maltese cross applied within the black Nationalist disc marking, the latter being outlined in white

the one remaining Republican enclave in the north. There was no room for complacency. The difficult terrain could well hinder progress and if Asturias could not be taken ahead of the autumn rains and winter snow, operations would have to be deferred until the spring. The whole of J/88 had now assembled at Pontejos. From here, the Bf 109s escorted bombers striking at Gijón, while 3.J/88 flew more freelance patrols, operating directly in front of the advancing ground troops, as well as engaging in the art of '*Kochenjagd*' ('hunting to ear') – a nickname given to vehicle-hunting missions, often at dusk, of which a leading exponent was Oberfeldwebel Ignaz 'Igel' Prestele.

Adolf Galland remembered that during such intensive operations in the He 51, on 'reloading the machine guns you usually cut your knuckles open on one of the many obstacles in the unbelievably confined space of the overheated cockpit. On hot days we flew in bathing trunks, and on returning from a sortie looked more like coalminers, dripping with sweat, smeared with oil and blackened by gunpowder smoke'.

New pilots continued to join J/88 from Germany in increasing numbers. 4 September saw Oberfeldwebel Reinhard Seiler of 1.J/88 claim his second kill – and the first by a German fighter over Asturias – when he downed an I-16, while another new arrival, Leutnant Eduard 'Edu' Neumann, who had joined 3. *Staffel* from I./JG 232, shot down a *Rata* for his first kill. He recalled;

'During my first operational flight over Asturias, on 4 September





Feldwebel Reinhard Seiler (left) of 1.J/88 recounts his latest air engagement to Hauptmann Gotthard Handrick, commander of J/88, over coffee and cake. Seiler was one of the *Legion Condor's* most successful fighter pilots, leaving Spain with nine confirmed kills. His last two (a pair of I-15s) were claimed on 22 February 1938. Seiler had also scored twice on 7 February when he destroyed two SB-2s. He was awarded the Diamonds to the Spanish Cross in Gold for his exploits

1937, I was flying behind Galland when I sighted a Polikarpov I-15, and I shot it down. It was very hard to do that with a He 51.'

Leutnant Heinrich Brücker of 1. *Staffel* claimed an I-16 on 7 September, while Boddem, increasing his score to nine, had shot down another *Rata* the day before. Oberleutnant Harder was particularly successful during this period, claiming his third victory on 7 September (an Airspeed AS 6 Envoy), followed by a Ni-H.52 and a 'Curtiss' (I-15) on the 9th and yet another 'Curtiss' on the 15th – the day his unit reported a total of seven Bf 109s and 14 He 51s on strength. On 27 September, three more *Ratas* were shot down, two by Harder, with another one to follow the next day.

These successes were offset by the loss of a He 51 pilot, whose identity is not clear, on 11 September, followed by that of Leutnant Hans Kemper when his He 51 collided with a He 70 during take-off.

The main target for the *Legion* by this stage was Gijón, J/88 strafing a fuel dump in the port that in turn became a burning pyre – dense smoke spiralled above the city for six days. On 21 September, 3.J/88 moved to the airfield at Llanes, on the Asturian coast, which had only recently been captured. From here it harried the Republican troops as they retreated west. 'Llanes was funniest aerodrome I have ever taken off from', recalled Galland. 'Situated on a plateau whose northern side fell sheer into the sea, with the three remaining sides almost as steep, it was like taking off from the roof of a skyscraper situated on the seashore'.

Over Gijón, the outnumbered Republican fighter pilots flew their Polikarpovs with a new level of desperation against the bombers of the *Legion Condor*, seemingly impervious to the presence of the Bf 109s as Handrick recalled;

'Our raids on Gijón did not always go quite so smoothly and without problems. The *Rojos* also put up enormous resistance against us in the air, and their *Ratas* and Curtisses were by no means easy prey. During the course of one air battle, I was engaged intensively with a Curtiss, and



since it was one of my first air battles, I was naturally convinced that I would be able to take care of the enemy crate in an instant. Far from it! Apart from the fact that my machine guns were not firing well for some reason or other, I must admit that I had not handled my position too well. I attacked the Curtiss from behind – it did an about-turn. Instead of pulling my nose up and then repeating the attack, I immediately attacked again, and at each attack managed to fire only ten rounds, whilst the Curtiss, which, of course, was slower than my aircraft, was able to compensate for that by being very manoeuvrable. It also had an excellent rate of climb and the pilot shot well.

‘Gradually, we distanced ourselves ever more from the coast, and in the end we were a good five kilometres out over the sea, directly facing Gijon, the Front being about 50 to 60 km away. Hence it was high time to call it a day! I drew closer to the Curtiss, ever closer, so close that in the end there was a weighty thud – I had collided with it.

‘On my aircraft, the wing had been hit directly at the fuselage root. In addition to that, the controls jammed. I made three or four involuntary rolls, one after the other, until I was finally able to flatten out the crate and with much effort fly in a straight line. Should I bail out, over the sea? *No thank you!* The water was too cold in October! I flew inwards towards the

Bf 109s parked in between the olive trees at the edge of La Sénia airfield in 1938, close to a tent set up in the shade by mechanics. The nearest aircraft is Bf 109D 6-9, flown firstly by Unteroffizier Wilhelm Gödecke while with VJ/88 prior to its reassignment to 2.J/88

A dismantled Republican Polikarpov I-16 at a forward airfield in northern Spain awaits collection to be taken to a central servicing depot. Designed at almost the same time as the I-15, and being delivered within two years of the first drawings being made, the pugnacious I-16 *Mosca* (Fly) all-metal, low-wing monoplane fighter, which was dubbed the *Rata* by German pilots, was powered by a 775 hp M-25B radial engine developed from the Curtiss-Wright Cyclone. The I-16 had a maximum speed of 455 km/h and carried an armament of two rapid-firing, wing-mounted 7.62 mm ShKAS machine guns that were then considered to be the best in the world. This gave the fighter a much heavier weight of firepower than the I-15. Although the cockpit construction, layout and instrumentation were rudimentary, what the I-16 lacked in sophistication it made up for in impressive manoeuvrability, turns, rate of roll and high speed (up to 600 km/h) when diving. With dwindling numbers of aircraft and pilots, the Republicans, and their Soviet supporters, continued to fight tenaciously against the Nationalist air force units despite having lost air superiority over the north by 1938





Storm clouds roll over La Sénia as a staff car drives past a row of Messerschmitts from J/88. The middle aircraft is Bf 109B 6-16, which was transferred from 2.J/88 to 3.J/88. The fighter was routinely flown by Leutnant Josef Fözö (who claimed three victories) during its time with the latter unit. The farthest machine is Bf 109D 6-63, but the identity of the nearest aircraft is unknown

A bowser adorned with *Legion Condor* markings dispenses fuel to a Bf 109B-2 at an airfield in Spain during the winter of 1937/38

land. If someone were to catch hold of me now – I dared not to bring this thought to a conclusion. At last I arrived over the Front, and then over Llanes. Here, over the airfield, I would be able to fling down the aircraft, but the airfield commander will berate me. “Where in the world do you think we can obtain spare parts when you fling the crate down? How are we to transport it away from here? All the bridges in the hinterland have been blown up, and it can take weeks before you’ll have a new aircraft”.

‘Under similar comforting thoughts, and with a choking aircraft, I reach Santander. Thank goodness! I’m at a height of only 150 metres. Very cautiously I let the undercarriage down. In doing so, out of my aircraft a piece of the wing of the enemy Curtiss flies away – a souvenir of one of my first air battles which I keep even today. After landing, I took a look at my bird. It had been badly damaged. The right wing was a mess, the fuselage was dented in, at the back were a few hits and the empennage needed to be repaired. However, I was very happy that I had been able to hold out, for after two days the damage had been more or less taken care of – and the bird continues to fly.’





On 27 September, five Bf 109s engaged in an air battle with five I-16s over the rooftops of Gijón. Harder accounted for one of the Russian fighters shot down, and he forced down another, strafing it several times as it landed. Leutnant Erich Wöitke of 1./J/88 also shot down a *Rata*. The next day saw almost a repeat of the action of the 27th, when five Messerschmitts encountered four enemy fighters over the city and Harder sent one down in flames. It was his ninth victory. Wöitke struck again on the 30th when he took on eight enemy fighters over Gijón. He shot down an I-16, while Flegel acquired a *Chato* as a 'probable'. On 13 October Harder claimed his tenth victim, bringing him level with Boddem.

The final phase of the push on Gijón saw *Legion* fighter operations undertaken in mechanical fashion, with fewer and fewer enemy aircraft being encountered. Most missions took the form of bomber escort, with He 111s and Ju 52/3ms blasting both front and rear positions.

On 15 October, the respective forces of Nationalist Gens Solchaga and Aranda linked up at Infiesto to the southeast of Gijón. Sperrle and von Richthofen were now buoyant, for the end in the north was in sight and German air power had won the day. On 21 October Nationalist forces entered Gijón, breaking the resistance in the Asturias and completing the conquest of the northwest. The Republican northern front collapsed, with 150,000 prisoners falling into Franco's hands. In the six-week campaign, 3./J/88 had fired 25,000 rounds of ammunition daily.

With the coming of the autumn rains in the Asturian mountains, the *Staffeln* of J/88 relocated to León, where they rested and their aircraft were given the overhaul many of them so badly needed, just ahead of changes at the most senior level of the *Legion Condor*, as well as at unit-level. Additionally, the arrival of new aircraft and a new *Staffel* from Germany was imminent, and these reinforcements would, along with the existing squadrons, be hurled into the fighting that would soon erupt in eastern Spain.

Bf 109B-2s 6-26 and 6-27 undergo maintenance outside a hangar. Both aircraft were delivered to Spain in July 1937 and, from their relatively 'clean' condition, this photograph may well have been taken shortly after their arrival

THE TACTICIAN FROM WESTFALIA

On 30 October 1937, two days after the Republican government had moved from Valencia to Barcelona, having taken control of the Catalan government, Generalmajor Sperrle relinquished command of the *Legion Condor* to Generalmajor Hellmuth Volkmann, the erstwhile head of the Administration Office in the RLM. A very experienced World War 1 aviator, Volkmann was a much less bombastic character than Sperrle. Quieter, more considered and regarded as honest by his superiors, he was well regarded by his subordinates. But Spain would be very different to anything the conservative Volkmann had experienced before, and he would struggle with local conditions, logistics and personalities. He would initially be supported by the headstrong and quarrelsome von Richthofen, who was his Chief-of-Staff at the *Legion's* new base at Burgos.

One of Volkmann's first measures – probably following consultation with Wilberg – was to restructure J/88 by enlarging it into four *Staffeln*. Thus, under the command of Handrick, the *Gruppe* was formed as follows;

1. *Staffel* with Bf 109s under Oberleutnant Harder
2. *Staffel* with Bf 109s under the newly-arrived Oberleutnant Joachim Schlichting
3. *Staffel* with He 51s under Oberleutnant Galland
4. *Staffel* with He 51s under Oberleutnant Eberhard d'Elsa (known as the 'Pik As' *Staffel*).

The men and aircraft to form the latter unit had arrived at Vigo by sea in early November 1937 and had formed up at León. The pilots had been drawn from a variety of *Jagdgruppen* in Germany, but the groundcrews all came from I./JG 136.

The period of rest in late 1937 was to be short-lived, and in December missions resumed at full pelt – but against an enemy with renewed resolve. On 4 December Feldwebel Otto Polenz was shot down when J/88 provided escort to He 111s bombing the airfield at Bujaraloz. The Bf 109s were attacked by a large group of I-16s that Harder described as being 'unbelievably manoeuvrable. It was difficult to get close to these fellows – one was always closing too fast, had only a fleeting instant to fire and almost rammed the target'.

Polenz' Messerschmitt came down virtually intact in enemy territory, and it was sent subsequently to the Soviet Union for evaluation. The next day, on the second mission to Bujaraloz, Oberfeldwebel Leo Sigmund was shot down and captured. On the 10th Harder's 1. *Staffel* was airborne again, with 15 Bf 109s flying deep into enemy territory. They were attacked by 30 enemy fighters. 'We were happy just to escape in one piece', Harder recounted later.



Generalmajor Hellmuth Volkmann (centre) took over from Generalmajor Hugo Sperrle as commander of the *Legion Condor* on 30 October 1937. An experienced World War 1 aviator, Volkmann was a much less bombastic character than Sperrle. Quieter, more considered and seen as honest by his superiors, he was also well regarded by his subordinates. But Spain would be very different to anything the conservative Volkmann had experienced before, and he would struggle with local conditions, logistics and personalities. He is seen here in discussion with Gen Alfredo Kindelán y Duany (left), commander of the Nationalist air arm and Major i.G. Hans Seidemann, the final Chief of Staff of the *Legion*. Behind the group, wearing sunglasses is Seidemann's predecessor, Major Hermann Plocher



Nine He 51s of the reformed 4.J/88 (led by Oberleutnant Eberhard d'Elsa), which was known as the 'Pik As' *Staffel*, are seen here lined up for inspection at La Sénia, in Aragón. They had arrived in Spain in early November 1937, and the aircraft carried their 'Pik-As' (Ace of Spades) emblem in the black Nationalist circles on their fuselages

The combined entrance to the quarters of 3. and 4.J/88 in late 1937, with boards displaying the units' respective *Mickey Mouse* and *Ace of Spades* emblems. Both markings would be used extensively by Luftwaffe fighter and ground-attack units in World War 2



Fuel was a problem too, and in itself required a frequent change of bases in order to obtain supplies. But in taking on fresh fuel, it had to be stored in drop tanks, which made He 51s vulnerable to ground-fire. However, the *Jagdflieger* were loathe to release their tanks – unless attacked by enemy fighters – because of the limited supply. It was a vicious circle. When attacking ground targets, calculations were made so that the approaching flight would take 50 minutes cruising at 2000 m to reach the target, at which point pilots would drop down to between 50-100 m to make their attacks. After spending no longer than ten minutes over the target, He 51 pilots would then have 55 minutes of fuel left for the return trip home.

Doubts began to fester in the minds of the pilots about just how 'easy' it was to fight the apparently rag-tag Republican air force. By the time the bulk of the *Jagdgruppe* was relocated to La Torresaviñán, in the province of Guadalajara, in November, it had used the time to refine its tactics and to devise more effective ways to use the Bf 109B against the I-16. The Messerschmitt could outdive the *Rata* up to an altitude of 3000 m, yet the Russian fighter held its own in terms of speed, manoeuvrability and climb. But above 3000 m, the I-16 was disadvantaged, with power ebbing away, and at 5000 m it was outclassed by the Messerschmitt, which excelled at 5000-6000 m.

Republican fighter pilots tended to fly in large formations, with the less experienced pilots positioned to the rear. The Germans realised that a *Kette* of Bf 109s flying 1000 m above and behind the *Ratas* could inflict significant damage on the I-16s by preventing their leaders from turning, because if they did, their formation would break up as the 'green' pilots

trailed behind. If this scenario developed, the Bf 109s could pounce, shoot down an enemy aircraft and dive away, often without the Republicans knowing what had happened.

Meanwhile, Volkmann had held meetings with the Spanish and Italian staffs, and worked on the understanding that the next Nationalist initiative would see a drive towards the Mediterranean through Aragón with ten divisions. This would require strong air cover. Ultimately, this offensive did not happen, however, for Franco changed his mind and decided to

return his effort to Madrid once again. Volkmann and his commanders thus had to ready themselves to conduct operations either from bases near Madrid or from airfields on the coast in the Zaragoza area.

Leutnant Eckehart Priebe was the Technical Officer with the new 4.J/88 at this time, and he recalled;

‘At León we received Spanish uniforms, put our Heinkels together and off we went to the Guadalajara Mountains for another of those “final assaults on Madrid” which never took place. Instead, on Christmas Eve 1937, we had to hurry to a field called Calamocha, south of Zaragoza, to help the beleaguered garrison at the city of Teruel which the Reds had surrounded in a surprise offensive. For more than two months we were engaged in a most bitter battle in ice-cold Aragón. We flew three to four ground-support missions a day at very low level, strafing trenches or dropping our six 10 kg bombs on gun positions or military transport. Aerial combat was left to the Bf 109s, as the Heinkels were no match for the Soviet-made *Ratas*.’

In mid-December the Republican Army of the Levante launched an offensive with 100,000 men, supported by 300 aircraft, designed to forestall the anticipated attack against Madrid by reducing the Nationalist-held salient around the walled town of Teruel overlooking the Turia and Alfambra rivers, which had protruded into Republican lines since the beginning of the war. It was a place notorious for experiencing the lowest temperatures in Spain. The ensuing battle was fought mostly in falling snow, where the climate was as much an enemy to both sides as they were to each other, and ground temperatures were down to -17°C. The overwhelming Republican attack, mounted against a stubborn Nationalist defence, pressed Franco into forestalling his planned Madrid offensive.

On 23 December, in an effort to support Franco’s forces, J/88 relocated to Calamocha so as to be closer to the action. That day, Unteroffizier Anton Kurz was lost when his fighter crashed and Wolfgang Schellmann took over command of 1.J/88 from Harro Harder. These changes were routine as the *Legion Condor* attempted to rotate flying personnel back to Germany after a year of service or, in the case of fighter



Pilots of 4.J/88 at Calamocha in early 1938. *Staffelkapitän* Oberleutnant Eberhard d'Elsa can be seen standing at far left with his back to the camera looking at the He 51. Identifiable in the group of four pilots in the foreground are, from second left, Unteroffizier Heinrich Torner (killed on 19 February 1938), Leutnant Fritz Awe (killed on 4 April 1938) and Leutnant Kurt Müller (three victories)

The pilot of Bf 109D 6-66 stands on the wing of his aircraft under a leaden sky. It appears as if the fighter has just returned from a sortie, and groundcrew are about to roll it back to its dispersal. The aircraft carries the emblem of 1.J/88 – a white diagonal cross – which was applied over the Nationalist identification marking on the fuselage between April 1937 and September 1938

pilots, after downing five enemy aircraft. They would return home to serve as instructor pilots in the flying schools.

‘The struggle for Teruel – a projecting tongue of the Front that lay far to the east in enemy territory – was particularly difficult for us’, Handrick recalled. ‘At the beginning of this battle, I was located in Calamocha, a tiny “nest” that was about 80 km away from Teruel. Whereas in the summer just passed we had enjoyed much more of the well-known Spanish sun than was good for us, we thus came to know in dreary Calamocha that there was indeed a Spanish winter which also spoke for itself.

By comparison, von Richthofen simply noted in his diary for the 23rd, ‘Went to Calamocha airfield. It’s good, quite close to the railway station. It’s okay for J/88’. Handrick, however, found the weather hard to take;

‘None of us had believed it to be possible that in Spain it could become really cold. The scorching heat of the summer had, in fact, helped to give us the notion that we would also experience a warm and pleasant winter. Shockingly, when I made my first reconnaissance flight to the Teruel Front on Christmas Eve, the thermometer showed -18°C. It was especially difficult for our groundcrews at Calamocha. Night after night and hour after hour, a special *Kommando* had to rev up the aircraft in order to keep them warm.’

Throughout January and almost all of February, Teruel remained the main focus of attention for the *Legion Condor*. The level of operations took its toll on man and machine. For example, at 0830 hrs on 7 January, 18 SB-2s attacked Calamocha and damaged five He 51s. The Heinkel *Staffeln* lost Leutnant Gerhard Klein 11 days later while attacking enemy concentrations near Fraga, his aircraft, 2-59, exploding in the air over Teruel. On 19 January, 400 Nationalist aircraft flew sorties from dawn to dusk, and on the 25th, Hauptmann Torsten Christ of the General Staff of the *Legion* noted that it was ‘only on account of the attacks by the *Legion Condor*, especially those by the He 51s, that the Red advance was brought to a stop.’

On 18 January, Schellmann claimed his first victory (a *Rata*) over Teruel. That same day Leutnant Voitke shot down another I-16,





He 51Bs of 4.J/88 sit in the shade of olive trees between missions at La Sénia. These aircraft continued to fly harassment sorties against Republican columns and armour in Aragón and over the Ebro well into the final phases of the Spanish Civil War

and 48 hours later Oberleutnant Wilhelm Balthasar of 1.J/88 and Oberfeldwebel Kurt Rochel of 2.J/88 destroyed a *Rata* and an I-15, respectively. Probably the most successful day for J/88 came on 7 February, however, when no fewer than ten SB-2s and two I-16s were destroyed in a large air battle over the Alfambra. Identifying a weak stretch of the Republican line north of Teruel, Franco had launched a counter-offensive in this area – a flanking attack with a spectacular cavalry charge that helped turn the tide, and trap the Republicans in Teruel. Four of the SB-2s fell to the guns of Balthasar within six minutes. Gotthardt Handrick recalled;

‘None of us would have had good memories of Calamocha had it not been for 7 February 1938. This was the date of a quite special triumph for my *Gruppe*, for we were successful in shooting down no fewer than 12 enemy aircraft – ten Martin bombers and two *Ratas* within five minutes. We had participated eagerly in the fighting over Teruel, and day-by-day we had carpeted the enemy positions with bombs.

‘On 7 February I was underway with two *Staffeln* providing cover for the bombers, which were scheduled to follow us. I flew with 1. *Staffel*, and far ahead of us was 2. *Staffel*. Hardly had we flown over the Front when we caught sight of a large number of aircraft in the east, which were flying exactly opposite to our course. Were these our own bombers which, having performed their task, were already on their way home?

‘Soon, however, we could make out from their blood-red emblems that these were enemy bombers. They were Martin aircraft, Soviet machines of American design, not dissimilar to our He 111s. 2. *Staffel*, flying ahead of us, immediately attacked the Reds. We also stepped on the gas and took out the aircraft that were there. My heart was beating with joy for up to now we had never seen so many Red bombers – there were 22 of them – and we got them under our guns. Not only that, but it appeared as if the bombers were not accompanied by any fighters at all.

‘When the Reds recognised us, they turned away, but it was too late. As they turned our 2. *Staffel* caught them, and two Red machines dived into the depths, leaving enormous trails of smoke behind them. Their crews saved themselves by parachute. The remaining 20 attempted to slip away, but they were already near enough to be held under our fire. In a wink of an eye, eight Reds began to burn and crashed like flaming torches. I myself had got to about 150 m behind one of the bombers.



A member of the *Guardia Civil* poses for a snapshot in front of Bf 109D 6-59 at La Sénia in mid-1938

I had the aircraft, as large as a barn door, in my sights. I pressed the trigger, but after 14 rounds both weapons jammed – the enemy machine just stayed there. I had to break off from my victim. I could clearly see how its machine-gunner was shooting at me like a savage.

‘Meanwhile, the enemy fighter cover also showed up on the scene. Three or four squadrons of *Ratas* suddenly came down on us like a warm rain, and there resulted a wild and lurching twisting and turning dogfight, which ended up with two enemy fighters sharing the same fate as the Martin bombers. For us, it was now high time to protect our own bombers from the fighters. The enemy had, however, obviously lost his appetite. He withdrew in the direction of Valencia and our *Kampfgruppe* was able to accomplish its task unmolested.

‘Upon landing, we learned that other than the 22 Martin bombers, 12 more enemy bombers, without fighter protection, had been attacked. It would have been a celebratory meal for us if we had been able to get these fat morsels in front of our machine guns as well, but as it was we could be content with the day’s successes. That 7th of February thoroughly reconciled us with the dreary Calamocha, in as much as that in recognition of our success we received crates of wine from some Spanish generals which we and our Spanish comrades used to forget the icy cold weather during our victory celebration.’

The previous month, on 12 January, the *Legion Condor* had claimed its 100th kill over Teruel when Unteroffizier Wilhelm Staeger of 2.J/88 downed an SB-2 for his second victory. Other successful pilots from this period were Leutnant Hans-Karl Mayer of 1.J/88, who accounted for an SB-2 and an I-16 during the aforementioned action of 7 February, and Reinhard Seiler of 2. *Staffel*, who shot down a pair of SB-2s in the same encounter, followed by two *Chatos* on the 22nd to reach nine victories. *Staffelführer* Joachim Schlichting scored against I-16s on 7 and 21 February to double his score, while a newcomer to his unit, Unteroffizier Herbert Ihlefeld, gained his first kill on the 21st. It was just one of seven victories claimed that day as the battered remains of Teruel, from which the Republicans had been able to break out only after

suffering heavy losses, were finally recaptured by the Nationalists.

Despite the deployment of the International Brigades, the battle at Teruel again resulted in devastating manpower and materiel losses for the Republic, whose Aragón armies were so weakened as to be unable to withstand the Nationalist counter-offensive into the region. Franco's forces had suffered no fewer than 50,000 casualties, a third due to cold, while many aircraft had also been destroyed in crashes because of bad weather or the inability to operate in such extreme temperatures. The Republicans lost at least 60,000 men.

Within the senior command of the *Legion*, not surprisingly, the personalities of Volkmann and von Richthofen had clashed following simmering tensions. On 11 January, the dynamic von Richthofen noted, 'I request my release from business immediately, vacation here and then a return trip home. Volkmann beams with agreement'. Two days later, he wrote to his wife, 'Volkmann and I must part company at the soonest possible date'. By the 30th he had gone, to be replaced by Major Hermann Plocher, another administrator from the Luftwaffe General Staff who was much more to Volkmann's tastes.

From 9 March 1938, as Franco launched his drive into Aragón (his troops being led by an array of his best generals), the war in Spain progressed much to his favour. Exploiting the collapse of the Republican armies in Aragón following the loss of Teruel, the Nationalists and the Italians launched an offensive backed by the *Legion Condor* and Italian air units, and supported by strong Italian artillery.

As ordered by Volkmann, the He 51s and Bf 109s flew at low level through clouds of dust thrown up by the artillery, operating just ahead of the friendly infantry and strafing panic-stricken enemy troops as they fled their trenches to the rear. The Bf 109Bs were moved to Estracón, from where they covered the attack. Barcelona was bombed by the Italians, prompting the German ambassador to comment, 'Terrible. All parts of the city were affected. There was no evidence of any attempt to hit military objectives'. However, although losses were light, the German squadrons suffered from wear and tear as a result of continuous operations and serviceable strength was reduced by a half.



Feldwebel Herbert Ihlefeld of 2.J/88 in the cockpit of his Bf 109B-1 6-6 following his return from having shot down his sixth – but unconfirmed – enemy aircraft (an I-15) in Spain on 25 June 1938. Ihlefeld would later enjoy a stellar career in the Luftwaffe, being credited with 130 victories in 1000 missions and serving as *Kommodore* of JG 52, JG 103, JGr 25, JG 1 and JG 11. He was awarded Swords to the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves in April 1942

Photographed in April 1938, these men were the four *Staffelkapitane* of J/88 at that time – from left to right, Oberleutnant Wolfgang Schellmann of 1.J/88, Oberleutnant Adolf Galland of 3.J/88, Oberleutnant Joachim Schlichting of 2.J/88 and Oberleutnant Eberhard d'Elsa of 4.J/88





A mechanic works on the engine of a Bf 109D-1 of J/88 at La Sénia

Using a winch and chains, the tail of Bf 109D-1 6-84 of 3.J/88 has been raised off the ground and supported by a trestle in order to undertake gun calibration tests at a makeshift range amidst olive trees at La Sénia in 1938. The Bf 109D-1 was fitted with two MG 17s above the engine and another in each wing



The German airmen felt some frustration at what they perceived as inefficiency in the way the Nationalists were handling their war effort, and the He 51 units in particular had suffered heavy losses to Republican fighters by the end of April.

'We are fighting on the wrong side', was a slogan that began to be uttered in some quarters of the German camp in a humorous, but realistic, acknowledgement of the determination of the Republican airmen. Nevertheless, the Republican ground forces were routed and the Nationalists were able to bludgeon their way to the Mediterranean at Vinaroz, splitting what remained of Republican territory in Castile from Barcelona and Catalonia. Widening the breach, an attempt to take Valencia ran into well prepared, but untested, enemy forces. In this defensive battle the Nationalists lost 20,000 men and were halted short of the city. Yet the Nationalist progress heralded the beginning of the end for the Republic.

Meanwhile, the *Legion Condor* welcomed two new arrivals in the spring of 1938. Firstly, among the 24 new Messerschmitts that docked



The 600 hp Jumo 210 engine of a Bf 109B-2 runs up in the warm Spanish air at La Sénia in 1938

in Spain in April were five new Augsburg-built Bf 109C-1s, into which it had been planned to fit a 700 hp Jumo 210G engine with fuel-injection and a two-stage compressor. This configuration was to be augmented by a pair of wing-mounted MG 17s to provide more firepower and a cockpit radio. Unfortunately, as would frequently happen to the Luftwaffe during the world war that would follow in 1939, the engine was simply not sufficiently ready, so most models were powered by the Jumo 210D.

After completing 280 sorties, Adolf Galland was ordered to return to Germany. His replacement as leader of 3./JG 88 was the former *Staffelkapitän* of 2./JG 334 who arrived in Spain on 24 May 1938 to join a growing number of his fellow squadronmates, having handed over command of his *Staffel* to returning Spanish 'veteran' Rolf Pingel. Oberleutnant Werner Mölders was a Westphalian and a devout Catholic with a reputation as a serious man with a fear of heights – a challenging phobia for an aviator. However, Mölders demonstrated early in his Luftwaffe career that his quiet tenacity and single-mindedness would overcome his fears, and it would not be long before he would make his formidable presence in the theatre felt.

In the meantime, however, the experiences of one of his pilots revealed just how dangerous the skies over Spain still were. Leutnant Fritz Losigkeit had joined 3./JG 88 in Zaragoza on 25 March 1938 from JG 132, and he recalled;

'Galland left Oberleutnant Horst Lehrmann in command, and he was assisted by Oberleutnant Mölders. Most of our missions could not be considered dangerous, since there was no anti-aircraft defence and the enemy infantry had very little chance of hitting us with small arms fire. However, on 31 May 1938, I took off in the afternoon for my second mission of the day – a mission which would prove to be my last in Spain. Lehrmann led the *Staffel* and Mölders led my *Schwarm*. We were briefed to attack an artillery position close to the front.

'After about 15 minutes I saw a cloud of dust in the target area, and as I approached I could see that it was caused by a truck. Because it was so near the front and close to enemy lines, I assumed it was carrying munitions. The truck was moving fast, and I quickly realised that it was actually making for the cover of the enemy defences. My first attack was unsuccessful, and I decided to approach the vehicle at the lowest possible altitude. When I neared it, a 2 cm four-barrelled flak gun opened fire. I was taken completely by surprise and my aircraft was hit at an altitude of 100 m. Fortunately, I was not wounded, but my aircraft was so badly damaged that I knew I would not be able to reach my lines. I decided to bail out.

'Seconds after opening my parachute I hit the ground. In the meantime, my comrades, having seen me shot down, opened fire in order

to discourage the enemy from attempting to pick me up. In fact, having released my parachute, they could see exactly where I was, and that I was still alive. I was captured almost immediately.'

Losigkeit would endure eight months in captivity in Valencia and Barcelona before eventually making it back to Germany in February 1939 – almost a year after joining the *Legion* – after having crossed the Pyrenees. He then rejoined his former *Staffelkapitän*, Hauptmann Handrick, in JG 234.

As spring gave way to the summer of 1938, the next model of Bf 109 – the D – arrived with 3J./88. Fitted with the Jumo 210Da engine, this variant carried the same four-gun arrangement as the Bf 109C, but was really a transitional aircraft built in anticipation of the Bf 109E. 1., 2. and 3. *Staffeln* now flew Bf 109s, with only Hauptmann d' Elsa's 4.J/88 retaining He 51s. As soon as each *Staffel* re-equipped with the Bf 109, its rates of operational success increased dramatically.

The first half of June 1938 saw mixed fortunes for J/88. A raid by Republican bombers on the fighter base at La Sénia, south of Tortosa, on 2 June resulted in the loss of five SB-2s around the airfield – three to the guns of Leutnant Kurt Heinrich of 2. *Staffel* and one each to Herbert Ihlefeld and Willi Meyer of the same unit. Although no less a figure than Hermann Göring wired his congratulations from Berlin on such an accomplishment, the *Jagdgruppe* did lose Leutnant Martin Haupt that same day when his aircraft was shot down by AA fire over Culla.

The *Legion Condor* command post, located high in the Sierra de San Christóbal, which had moved from one mountain top to another as the Nationalist advance bore south from Morella, was attacked by nine enemy bombers accompanied by 31 fighters on 3 June. On this occasion



Oberleutnant Hans Schmoller-Haldy of 3.J/88 (centre, with arms crossed) in discussion with other J/88 personnel at La Sénia in 1938. The aircraft seen here does not appear to be Schmoller-Haldy's oft-photographed Bf 109E-3, coded 6-123

On 23 June or July 1938 (records vary), Unteroffizier Boer of 3.J/88 made a forced landing in Bf 109 6-90 following combat with a large formation of Republican I-15 and I-16 fighters over the Ebro front. The aircraft, the fourth 'Emil' to arrive in Spain, was subsequently salvaged



there was not enough time to scramble the Bf 109s, but although the command post was strafed and bombed, there were no casualties.

On the 8th, the Heinkel of Leutnant Erich Beyer of 4.J/88 was hit by ground fire as it strafed enemy ground columns and crashed in flames at Sarratella, killing its pilot. For the next few days, unseasonal weather prevented fighter operations, but on 13 June a large formation of Bf 109s intercepted an equally sizeable group of enemy fighters. Wolfgang Schellmann of 1.J/88 and Wolfgang Ewald of 2.J/88 both claimed I-16s, while Staeger, Unteroffizier Bernhard Seufert (2.J/88), Leutnant Lothar Keller (1.J/88) and Unteroffizier Erich Kuhlmann (1.J/88) each accounted for an I-15. Kuhlmann would strike again, shooting down another *Chato* the next day for his second victory while flying escort to He 111s. Oberleutnant Helmut Henz' Bf 109 was hit over Castellón, however, and he crash-landed his machine north of the Mijares river. He managed to set his fighter alight but was subsequently taken prisoner.

In time, Werner Mölders and the Bf 109 became a formidable duo, with Mölders scoring his first victory in a C-model on 15 July (an I-15) over Villamalur. It had proven a tough challenge for him to manoeuvre his Messerschmitt in an engagement in which his formation of six fighters were outnumbered by 25-30 Republican machines, and he questioned the wisdom of his decision to take them on.

In a violent, whirling encounter in which Mölders found himself sweating 'like a bull', he dived and reeled around the sky until eventually, coming up on an enemy machine, he closed to just 50 metres and opened fire. He continued firing as he followed the *Chato* down to its destruction. Mölders then felt relief that all his comrades had survived the brutal encounter. His victory was followed by another *Chato* kill two days later. Schellmann was the leading German *experte* in Spain at this time, his tally having reached eight by the end of July, including two in one day – both I-16s – on the 20th.

Other pilots such as Herbert Ihlefeld of 2.J/88 had burst upon the scene too, scoring nine victories by 9 July, while Leutnant Walter Oesau of the *Stab* J/88, accounted for three enemy aircraft in July. Pilots who had already scored five or more victories before Mölders opened his account were Harder (11), Balthasar (6), Ihlefeld (9), Seiler (9), Unteroffizier Kurt Rochel (6), Mayer (5) and Schellmann (5). These were names that would become familiar to the German public in coming years. In Spain, Mölders soon caught up and surpassed them all.

On 20 July, *Sonderstab W* issued a situation report stating that 'In the five days since the delivery of 22 new Bf 109s, the German *Jagdgruppe* has shot down 22 Red fighters without loss'. However, on the 27th Unteroffizier Franz Jaenisch of 3.J/88 had to crash-land his Bf 109 southwest of Tortosa.

Hauptmann Werner Mölders, Staffelführer of 3.J/88 stands in front of his Bf 109D-1 6-79, which carried the name *Luchs* (Lynx) on both sides of the engine cowling, while the port side of the aircraft also featured the *Mickey Mouse* Staffel emblem. Mölders, a gifted aviator and an insightful tactician, would emerge as the highest scoring German pilot in Spain by the end of the Civil War with 14 victories. He would later be awarded Germany's most prestigious military award, the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds, prior to being killed in a flying accident in November 1941 whilst attempting to attend the funeral of World War 1 fighter ace Ernst Udet





Unteroffizier Franz 'Francisco' Jaenisch of 3.J/88 (centre) and two colleagues in typically informal garb enjoy an off-duty period at La Sénia in 1938. Jaenisch flew as wingman to Werner Mölders

Unteroffizier Herbert Schob's Bf 109E-1 6-91 (one of two aircraft he was known to have flown) was photographed at La Sénia in the early autumn of 1938. Schob would be credited with six victories in Spain between 24 September 1938 and 22 January 1939, although his last was unconfirmed. All were I-16s bar one – an SB-2 bomber shot down on 16 November 1938



His aircraft was a complete wreck, but Jaenisch was not injured and in a few days was back in the air with another fighter. Three days later, J/88 provided fighter cover for five bomber and Stuka missions, as well as undertaking two search-and-destroy missions in the Flix area, but without success.

Once in action, Mölders had quickly identified that the average pilot paid more attention to avoiding collisions with his fellow airmen than he did to combat, and that there was a need to dispense

with 'conventional' fighter tactics that had their origins steeped in the doctrine and methods of World War 1. Furthermore, it was imperative to take advantage of the increase in speed and manoeuvrability that came with the monoplane, as well as the advent of radio, which meant that it was no longer necessary to fly close to the leader to observe his hand signals.

Soon after arriving in Spain, Mölders proposed a 'finger-four' (as it became known to the British and Americans) formation system as an alternative to the three-aircraft *Kette*. When viewed from above, each aircraft flew in the style of the four fingertips of a horizontally extended hand, palm down, with fingers straight and slightly spread. In this system a unit of two Bf 109s would consist of a leader in front (usually the more experienced pilot and marksman) and a second fighter flying 200 m behind and to port or starboard at a higher altitude.

Although not the first air force to conceive the system, the *Legion Condor* would be the first to test the formation in a combat environment. This basic two-aircraft flight would be known as the *Rotte*, with two *Rotten* forming a *Schwarm* that imitated and operated the separate *Rotten* in a similar way. The immediate advantage to this loose and flexible system, which abandoned the more rigid wing-to-wing 'V' formations in which large expanses of sky were cut off from view by friendly aircraft, was that the leader could concentrate on scanning the sky for the enemy while the wingman would cover the vulnerable rear. Furthermore, such a formation reduced the risk of collision and allowed greater manoeuvrability and higher speeds.

Several four-aircraft *Schwarme* could operate together in *Staffel*-strength, staggered at different altitudes so that there was an even greater element of mutual search and protection, as well as flexibility, when engaging the opposition. However, converting from the tight *Kette* to the more open *Rotte* often proved difficult, even for experienced pilots — especially

when members of the *Schwarm* made a sharp turn simultaneously. The long distance between the extreme right and extreme left aircraft would force the pilot closest to the centre of the arc to reduce speed, while the aircraft furthest from the centre of the arc had to increase speed. In order to avoid this problem, the wingman, who flew slightly higher than the leader, was to sideslip over the leader to make both members of the *Rotte* scribe the same arc.

The dangers inherent in the sideslip crossover manoeuvre were demonstrated on 4 April when 1. and 2./J/88 relocated from Zaragoza to Larraja, south of Huesca, where Volkmann was to make an inspection of the units. Leading a *Schwarm* from 1. *Staffel*, Leutnant Fritz Awe ordered a 90-degree turn to port as the Messerschmitts made their landing approach around midday. As his wingman, Unteroffizier Adolf Borchers, overlapped Awe's Bf 109, his propeller cut into Awe's cockpit, breaking the fuselage in half. The tail spun to the ground while the cockpit, forward fuselage, engine and wing fell in pieces after it. Awe was discovered decapitated in the remains of his cockpit. Borchers, whose fighter overturned upon landing, suffered only light injuries.

It was in the great Republican offensive on the Ebro river, which was launched on the evening of 24 July 1938 and given strong air support over the next few days, that the new German aircraft and air tactics really came into their own. It was also at this stage of the war that the adversaries reached their zenith in terms of operational potential – the 176 serviceable Republican I-16, I-15 and Grumman G-23 *Delfin* fighters slightly outnumbered the 168 Nationalist CR.32s and Bf 109s (96 Italian and 36 Spanish CR.32s, and 36 German Bf 109s).

The Ebro would mark the start of the final phase of the Spanish Civil War, and for the Republic it marked the most important but most technically challenging and militarily difficult offensive action of the



Leutnant Wolfgang Lippert of 3./J/88, seen here describing an air combat to two Spanish Nationalist military personnel, scored his first of five victories in Spain over an I-15 on 15 July 1938. He was awarded the Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords followed by a Knight's Cross in September 1940 on the occasion of his 12th victory while serving with II./JG 27. He died in British captivity in December 1941 following injuries sustained in combat



A busy scene at La Sénia in the summer of 1938 as Bf 109s of 2./J/88 are prepared for another mission. Bf 109C-1 6-60 in the foreground was an aircraft flown by Unteroffizier Herbert Schob. At some stage (not in evidence here) Schob, who was known by the nickname of 'the fat one', painted the acronym NNWW (Nur Nicht Weich Werden – 'Don't Give In') just beneath the cockpit. Schob, who ended World War 2 with 28 victories, would be awarded the Knight's Cross in June 1944 for his achievements as a *Zerstörer* pilot with ZG 76. The aircraft behind 6-60 has five victory bars on its rudder



Leutnant Rudolf Goy of 3.J/88 returns triumphantly to La S3nia from another mission in his Bf 109D coded 6-75. Goy would claim three victories in Spain all in the month of September 1938, and all I-16s, although his first was unconfirmed. His aircraft carried the personal marking of a stylised bird within the Nationalist fuselage identification symbol

The last commander of 1.J/88, Hauptmann Siebelt Reents, rests casually in full flying gear on the edge of the cockpit of Bf 109D 6-86, one of the aircraft he was known to fly during his tenure of command from early September 1938 until the end of the war. Reents would shoot down his only enemy aircraft in Spain – an I-15 – on 6 February 1939. The *Holzauge* (Wooden Eye) unit emblem introduced by Reents was a reference to the Spanish gesture of pulling down the bottom eyelid with one finger to indicate the need for caution



whole war, opening with a level of success it had never before enjoyed. A force of 100,000 Republicans marshalled as the *Ej3rcito del Ebro* (Army of the Ebro) and well-supported by tanks, artillery and aircraft, crossed the river in a surprise attack and broke through a part of the Nationalist defensive line. The Nationalists responded by launching an unrelenting air interdiction campaign that crippled Republican transport and logistics.

By 28 July the crisis was over, the Nationalists' temporary line being able to hold due to the loss of Republican momentum.

The Republican advance was slowed down by the constant attacks on its reinforcements, roads, bridges and supply columns, and by 1 August the *Ej3rcito del Ebro* had been ordered to go onto the defensive. The performance of the *Legion Condor* demonstrated the flexibility of air power in support of a ground campaign.

In August 1938, J/88 shot down around 30 enemy aircraft, mostly fighters. Throughout the month, 90 I-16 Type 10s had been assembled by the Republicans in Figueras from a batch shipped to the French Atlantic coast, and these allowed the re-equipment of six *escuadrillas*. Schellmann added a pair of SB-2s and a pair of I-16s to his score, while Leutnant Otto Bertram of 1.J/88, who had been transferred in following ground-attack duties, had scored four aerial victories by the end of his first month in Spain. His first had been claimed on the 14th in an air battle that took place in full view of a group of Nationalist generals.

On 19 August the Nationalists counter-attacked towards Fatarelle, with strong support from the *Legion Condor*. Although J/88 destroyed four *Ratas*, little success was achieved on the ground. Next day, Schellmann scored his 12th, and last, victory in Spain, making him the highest-scoring German pilot to date. Nationalist troops at last began to make slow inroads into the Republican advance, while in the air J/88 destroyed four aircraft on 23 August and five more by 9 September. One

of the latter was M3lders' sixth victory, scored in a one-sided air battle against 60 enemy aircraft that required every measure of his skill as a fighter pilot.

Handrick was finally relieved as commander of J/88 on 10 September, his place being taken by Hauptmann Walter Grabmann, the former commander of I./JG 234. Around the same time, Hauptmann Siebelt Reents took over from Schellmann in 1.J/88, while simultaneously a number of other experienced pilots returned to

Germany due to the looming Sudeten crisis. Successes continued however, four Republican aircraft being shot down on 20 September, ten on the 23rd and four on the 27th. On 4 October, two I-15s and an I-16 were destroyed.

At the end of October, the Nationalists launched a major offensive against the Ebro. Although possessing about 100 fighters, the Republicans could not claim air superiority. Trying to penetrate the Nationalist fighter screen of Bf 109s and Fiats, they lost seven I-16s and two I-15s to the guns of 2. and 3.J/88 on the last day of the month. On 3 November – the day Mölders scored his final kill in Spain – Nationalist forces captured the town of Pinell, marking the first major breakthrough at the Ebro. The fighting on the Ebro continued until 16 November, by which time the *Ejército del Ebro* had retreated across the river and the Nationalists regained all the territory lost.

The three-and-a-half month battle had resulted in the loss of 300 Republican aircraft, more than one-third of them being destroyed by J/88 and no fewer than 42 by Mölders' 3.J/88. Mölders would emerge as the highest-scoring fighter pilot of the *Legion Condor* with 14 victories, plus three unconfirmed. Purportedly, he had managed to keep his score hidden from those who would order him home. When the authorities did find out, it was apparently by accident!

After the battle of the Ebro the *Legion* was ordered to rest, with only one *Staffel* of J/88 remaining operational. At its height in the late autumn of 1938, the *Legion Condor* had at most 45 Bf 109s operational. At the end of November, Volkmann was replaced by von Richthofen, who returned to Spain as commander of the *Legion*. Mölders was also posted back to Germany at this time, his place as commander of 3.J/88 being taken by Oberleutnant Hubertus von Bonin.

It seems that a Bohemian atmosphere prevailed within the ranks of J/88 in the final stages of the war. On 21 December, von Richthofen visited La Sénia and noted;

'Things at J/88 are just about tolerable. The *Verbandsführer* of J/88 are at the present time quartered far away from their people. Too many personnel were to be seen running around without wearing uniforms, playing during celebrations with priests' hats and they have no communal dining facility. It does not please me at all. It will be remedied and J/88 will soon be relocated.'

On 23 December 1938, the Nationalists launched what would



Mechanics work on the engine and cockpit of Bf 109E 6-119, one of the usual aircraft of Hauptmann Siebelt Reents, *Kapitän* of 1.J/88. The fighter also carries the *Holzauge* emblem of 1. *Staffel*, which was introduced during the final phase of the Spanish Civil War when the unit was re-equipped with the Bf 109. Also visible in this photograph beneath the feet of the mechanic on the wing is the area of black paint running from the engine exhaust across the wing root to the wing trailing edge intended to conceal smoke blackening from the Daimler-Benz DB 601 engine

One of the brightly coloured weatherboard huts used by 2.J/88 at La Sénia and decorated with various *Staffel* and unit emblems. The hut, built on stilts so as to evade vermin, was surrounded by a raised walkway so that members of the *Staffel* could enjoy the Spanish sun during off-duty hours





German pilots and groundcrew assemble at Zaragoza-Sanjurjo airfield at the end of the Spanish Civil War shortly before handing over their aircraft to the Spanish Nationalist Air Force. Behind the group is Hauptmann Siebelt Reents' Bf 109E 6-119

prove to be the last major offensive in which the *Legion Condor* was involved. The plan was to strike north and east through Catalonia, with the intention of taking Barcelona and the area bordering France. Despite valiant resistance, the Loyalist forces were gradually driven back toward Barcelona. By this time the first Bf 109E-1s had been delivered to J/88 at La Sénia, the new variant being powered by a 1100 hp Daimler-Benz 601A engine that gave a maximum speed of around 555 km/h. Between 28 and 30 December, J/88 shot down 16 Republican aircraft, including one which fell to Oberleutnant Alfred von Lojewski, the new CO of 2.J/88. By late December the Bf 109 dominated the skies over Spain.

Bad weather was to curtail operations during this period, but on 12 January 1939, Bf 109s carried out a surprise attack on Republican airfields, destroying 13 aircraft on the ground. On the 16th, J/88 was transferred from Zaidin to Lérida. As the Nationalists continued to advance on Barcelona, 3.J/88 shot down four aircraft on 17 January. Four days later the *Gruppe* moved to Valls airfield north of Tarragona. That day, Bf 109s downed four I-16s. According to the official German account of the Catalanian offensive, J/88 had 'a great day'. On the 24th Bf 109s covered Ju 87s attacking the bridge at Molina del Rey.

Barcelona fell on 26 January, and two days later the Bf 109s guarded a large victory parade over the city in case there should be a surprise attack. On the 29th J/88 escorted bombers from K/88 sent to attack the railway stations at Gerona and Figueras. When it became apparent that no enemy fighters were going to show themselves, the Bf 109s switched to attacking motor transport along the coastal roads. The next few days were spent in pursuing what remained of the Republican forces towards the Pyrenees, but heavy rains restricted operations.

A pair of 10 kg bombs are used to weight down Bf 109E 6-105 at Zaragoza against sudden gusts of wind, which were quite common on Spanish airfields. The Messerschmitt-supplied tarpaulins were used as a form of light protection for engines and cockpits against dust and heat





Pilots of 1.J/88 pose with a canine mascot at Zaragoza-Sanjurjo at the end of the Spanish Civil War. They are, from left to right, Unteroffiziere Halupczek, Holitzke and Hans Nirminger (partially hidden), Oberleutnant Wolf-Dietrich 'Fürst' Wilcke, Leutnant Gustav Roedel, Hauptmann Siebelt Reents (*Staffelkapitän*), Oberleutnante Hubertus von Holtey and Karl-Heinz Sandmann, Leutnant Albrecht von Minnigerode, Oberleutnant Hermann von Hollweg and Leutnant August-Wilhelm Schumann

In early February J/88 flew escort missions for bombers sent to attack Republican airfields, shooting down three aircraft on 5 February and four on the 6th. On the latter date the unit suffered its last operational loss when Unteroffizier Heinrich Windemuth's Bf 109E-1 crashed in flames during an attack on Vilajuiga airfield. On 6 March J/88 scored its 314th, and last, victory – a 'Curtiss' shot down by von Bonin.

The *Legion Condor* took little part in the final offensive against Madrid, flying what were described as 'practice missions' during the last days of the war. On 17 March, for example, J/88 sent three Bf 109s on a *freie Jagd* over Madrid but without meeting any opposition. The last sortie came ten days later when the unit escorted the bombers of K/88 for a final mission against forward Republican positions. Earlier that same day a Hs 126 reconnaissance aircraft had reported seeing white flags flying in the capital, and at 1000 hrs von Richthofen sent the long-awaited message, 'All German units will cease operations!' On 28 March the Nationalists entered Madrid and the war was effectively over.

The conflict had cost some 700,000 lives in battle, with another 30,000 executed or assassinated and 15,000 killed in air raids. The *Legion Condor* had played a significant role in winning Spain for Franco, and the Civil War had demonstrated the importance of air power to battlefield victory. The success of every major Nationalist offensive and defensive operation was dependent upon clear air superiority. In summary, however, and in context, the air war had seen experimentation, trial and error, and success and failure for both sides. As such, it is difficult to argue with the maxim of Rittmeister Manfred von Richthofen, perhaps the greatest and most iconic fighter pilot of all time;

'Find the enemy and shoot him down – anything else is nonsense.'

APPENDICES

Top-Scoring Legion Condor Fighter Pilots (five aerial victories or more)

Werner Mölders, 3.J/88

Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds

Spain:

15/7/38	I-15	1
17/7/38	I-15	2
19/7/38	I-16	3
19/8/38	I-16	4
23/8/38	SB-2	5
9/9/38	I-15	6
13/9/38	I-16	7
23/9/38	I-16	8
10/10/38	I-16	9
15/10/38	I-16	10
15/10/38	I-16	11
31/10/38	I-16	12
31/10/38	I-16	13
3/11/38	I-16	14

World War 2:

Transferred from RLM as StKp (*Staffelkapitän*) 1./JG 53 – 15 March 1939

Kmdr (*Kommandeur*) III./JG 53 – 3 October 1939

Knight's Cross – 29 May 1940 (20 victories)

Kdre (*Kommodore*) JG 51 – 27 July 1940

Oak Leaves – 21 September 1940 (2nd recipient, 40 victories)

First to score – 40 victories 29 September 1940

Swords – 22 June 1941 (2nd recipient, 72 victories)

First to score 101 victories – 15 July 1941

First recipient of Diamonds (101 victories)

Appointed Inspector of Fighters – 7 August 1941

Killed in crash of He 111, Schmiedefeld, nr Breslau on 22 November 1941

Final rank – Oberst

Total – 115 victories (68 in West, 33 in East + Spain)

Wolfgang Schellmann, 1.J/88

Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds

Spain:

18/1/38	I-16	1
8/3/38	I-15	2
24/3/38	I-15	3
13/6/38	I-16	4
25/6/38	I-16	5
18/7/38	I-16	6
20/7/38	I-16	7
20/7/38	I-16	8
12/8/38	SB-2	9
12/8/38	SB-2	10
14/8/38	I-16	11
20/8/38	I-16	12

World War 2:

With Stab I./JG 77 in Poland – 1939

Kmdr II./JG 2 – December 1939

Kdre JG 2 – 3 September 1940

Knight's Cross – 18 September 1940 (10 victories)

Kdre JG 27 – 3 November 1940

Shot down nr Grodno, Russia on 22 June 1941. Believed to have been executed by Russian security forces soon after

Final rank – Oberstleutnant

Total – 25 victories (13 during World War 2 plus Spain) in approximately 150 recorded missions

Harro Harder, 1.J/88

Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds

Spain:

4/1/37	I-16	1
27/8/37	SB-2	2
7/9/37	Airspeed AS 6 Envoy	3
9/9/37	Ni-H.52C.1	4
9/9/37	I-15	5
15/9/37	I-15	6
27/9/37	I-16	7
27/9/37	I-16	8
28/9/37	I-16	9
13/10/37	I-16	10
5/12/37	I-15	11

World War 2:

St.Kp. 1./LG 2

St.Kp. 1./JG 77 – 1 October 1937-October 1939

Kmdr III./JG 53 – July 1940

Shot down by Spitfire off South Coast of England and killed 12 August 1940

Final rank – Hauptmann

Total – Believed to be 22 victories (11 during World War 2 plus Spain)

Peter Boddem, 2.J/88

Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds

Spain:

12/7/37	I-16	1
13/7/37	I-16	2
21/7/37	I-16	3
25/7/37	I-16	4
13/8/37	I-16	5
17/8/37	I-15	6
17/8/37	I-16	7
18/8/37	I-15	8
6/9/37	I-16	9

9/9/37 I-16 10 (unconfirmed)
 Understood to have been killed in a flying accident on 20 March 1939 while a passenger in a Ju 52/3m on leaving Spain
 Final rank – Leutnant

Otto Bertram, 1.J/88

Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds

Spain:

12/8/38	I-16	1
14/8/38	I-16	2
15/8/38	I-16	3
23/8/38	I-16	4
7/9/38	I-16	5 (unconfirmed)
7/9/38	I-16	6 (unconfirmed)
23/9/38	I-16	7 (unconfirmed)
27/9/38	I-16	8
4/10/38	I-15	9

World War 2:

StKp 1./JG 2 – 26 October 1939
 Appointed Kmdr III./JG 2 – 24 September 1940
 Knight's Cross – 28 October 1940 (13 victories)
 Withdrawn from frontline duties and assigned to JFS 5 under special orders to protect last surviving male heir of family. Also served in staff positions
 Appointed Kmdr I./JG 6 – February 1945
 Final rank – Major
 Total – 21 victories (12 during World War 2 plus Spain)

Wilhelm Ensslen, 2.J/88

Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds

Spain:

23/8/38	I-15	1
5/9/38	I-15	2
20/9/38	I-16	3
28/12/38	SB-2	4
28/12/38	I-16	5
30/12/38	I-16	6
1/1/39	I-16	7
9/1/39	I-16	8
5/2/39	I-15	9

World War 2:

Kmdr II./JG 52 – 27 August 1940
 Missing in Action over England 2 November 1940 following engagement with Spitfire. Bailed out of Bf 109 over Kent but parachute did not open
 Final rank – Hauptmann
 Total: 12 victories (3? in World War 2 plus Spain)

Herbert Ihlefeld, 2.J/88

Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords

Spain:

21/2/38	I-16	1
13/3/38	I-15	2
11/5/38	I-16	3
18/5/38	I-16	4 (unconfirmed)

2/6/38	SB-2	5
25/6/38	I-16	6 (unconfirmed)
12/7/38	I-15	7
15/7/38	I-15	8
15/7/38	I-15	9

World War 2:

StKp 2.(J)/LG 2
 Kmdr I./JG 77 – 30 August 1940
 Knight's Cross – 13 September 1940 (21 victories)
 Oak Leaves – 27 June 1941 (40 victories)
 Fifth pilot to reach 100 victories on 22 April 1942
 Swords – 24 April 1942 (101 victories)
 Kdre JG 52 – 11 May 1942
 Kdre JG 103 and JGr 25
 Served on *Stab 30. Jagddivision*
 Kdre JG 11 – 1 May 1944
 Kdre JG 1 – 20 May 1944 to end of war
 Final rank – Oberst
 Total – 130 victories (123 during World War 2, including 14 four-engined bombers, plus 7 Spain)

Walter Oesau, *Stab.J/88*

Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds

Spain:

15/7/38	I-15	1
17/7/38	I-15	2
18/7/38	I-16	3
20/7/38	I-15	4
27/7/38	SB-2	5
15/8/38	I-15	6
20/8/38	I-16	7
15/10/38	I-16	8
3/11/38	I-16	9

World War 2:

StKp 7./JG 51 – 1940
 Kmdr III./JG 51 – August 1940
 Knight's Cross – 20 August 1940 (20 victories – fifth pilot to reach this total)
 Kmdr III./JG 3 – 11 November 1940
 Oak Leaves – 6 February 1941 (40 victories – fourth pilot to reach this total)
 Swords – 15 July 1941 (80 victories)
 Kdre JG 2 – 28 July 1941
 June 1943 appointed *Jafü* Bretagne
 Kdre JG 1 – 1 January 1944
 Killed in Action – 11 May 1944 during engagement with US fighters
 Final rank – Oberst
 Total – 125 victories (72 in West, including 12 four-engined bombers, 44 in East plus Spain)

Reinhard Seiler, 2.J/88

Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds

Spain:

26/8/37	I-15	1
4/9/37	I-16	2
29/11/37	I-16	3
12/1/38	SB-2	4

22/1/38	I-16	5
7/2/38	SB-2	6
7/2/38	SB-2	7
22/2/38	I-15	8
22/2/38	I-15	9

World War 2:

StKp 1./JG 54 – December 1939

Kmdr III./JG 54 – 30 September 1941

Knight's Cross – 20 December 1941 (42 victories)

Kmdr I./JG 54 – May 1943

Wounded shortly after scoring 100th victory on 6 July 1943 and withdrawn from frontline service

Oakleaves – 2 March 1944 (100 victories)

Appointed Kdre JG 104 – August 1944

Final rank – Major

Total – 100 victories (including 16 night victories in Russia) plus Spain

Herwig Knüppel, J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords****Spain:**

26/8/36	Casa-Breguet 19	1
27/8/36	Ni-H.52C.1	2
30/8/36	Potez 540	3
5/9/36	Ni-H.52C.1	4
6/9/36	Potez 540	5
17/9/36	Ni-H.52C.1	6
13/11/36	I-15	7
12/12/36	SB-2	8

World War 2:

Kmdr II./JG 26 – 28 June 1939

Shot down and killed in action over France on 19 May 1940

Final rank – Hauptmann

Total – 3 victories in World War 2, plus Spain

Hans-Karl Mayer, 1.J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords****Spain:**

7/2/38	SB-2	1
7/2/38	I-16	2
21/2/38	I-16	3
29/3/38	I-15	4
13/6/38	I-16	5 (unconfirmed)
16/6/38	SB-2	6

Believed to have scored two further victories

World War 2:

StKp 1./JG 53 – 1 October 1939

Five victories in one day over Sedan on 14 May 1940

Kmdr I./JG 53 – 1 September 1940

Missing in action on 17 October 1940 following routine flight over English Channel

Final rank – Hauptmann

Total – Not known but at least 30, plus Spain

Kraft Eberhardt, J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds****Spain:**

25/8/36	Casa-Breguet 19	1
26/8/36	Casa-Breguet 19	2
29/8/36	Potez 540	3 (unconfirmed)
30/8/36	Potez 540	4
30/9/36	Potez 540	5
30/9/36	Potez 540	6
13/11/36	I-15	7 (unconfirmed)

Killed in Action over Casa de Campo, Madrid, Spain, on 13 November 1936

Walter Grabmann, Stab J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords****Spain:**

23/9/38	SB-2	1
23/9/38	I-15	2
23/9/38	I-16	3
10/10/38	SB-2	4
15/10/38	I-16	5
3/11/38	I-16	6 (unconfirmed)
4/1/39	I-15	7

World War 2:

Kmdr I.(Z)/LG 1 in Poland – 1939

Kdre ZG 76 in French campaign – 1940

Knight's Cross – 14 September 1940 (six victories)

Appointed *Jafü* Norwegen – 1941

Appointed commander 3. *Jagddivision* – 1944

Final rank – Generalmajor

Total – Six victories in West, plus Spain (where he flew 137 missions)

Horst Tietzen, 3.J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords****Spain:**

19/7/38	I-16	1
20/9/38	I-16	2 (unconfirmed)
20/9/38	I-16	3 (unconfirmed)
27/9/38	I-16	4
27/9/38	I-16	5
21/12/38	I-16	6
29/12/38	I-16	7

World War 2:

StKp. 5./JG 51 – 29 August 1939

Fourth pilot with 20 victories

Killed in Action over English Channel 18 August 1940

Knight's Cross (posthumous) – 20 August 1940

Final rank – Hauptmann

Total – 20 victories, plus Spain

Wilhelm Balthasar, 1.J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds****Spain:**

20/1/37	I-16	1 (unconfirmed)
20/1/38	I-16	2
7/2/38	SB-2	3
7/2/38	SB-2	4
7/2/38	SB-2	5
7/2/38	SB-2	6

World War 2:

StKp 7./JG 27 – 1940

Knight's Cross – 14 June 1940 (23 victories)

Kmdr III./JG 3 – 1 September 1940

Seriously wounded on 4 September 1940

Kdre JG 2 – 16 February 1941

Oakleaves – 2 July 1941 (40 victories)

Killed in Action over France on 3 July 1941

Final rank – Major

Total – 40 victories, plus Spain

Rolf Pingel, 2.J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords****Spain:**

5/6/37	I-15	1 (unconfirmed)
8/7/37	SB-2	2
12/7/37	SB-2	3
12/7/37	I-16	4
16/7/37	I-16	5
22/8/37	I-16	6

World War 2:

StKp 2./JG 53 – April 1938

Kmdr I./JG 26 – 22 August 1940

Knight's Cross – 14 September 1940 (15 victories)

PoW following combat over England on 10 July 1941

Final rank – Major

Total – 22 victories, plus Spain

Kurt Rochel, 2.J/88**Spain:**

29/11/37	I-16	1
20/1/38	I-15	2
21/2/38	I-16	3
10/3/38	I-16	4
18/5/38	I-16	5
10/6/38	I-16	6

World War 2:

With 5./ZG 26 in May 1940. At least one victory (shot down a Spitfire in May 1940)

Shot down and captured over English Channel on 2 September 1940

Final rank – Oberfeldwebel

Herbert Schob, 2.J/88**Spanish Cross****Spain:**

24/9/38	I-16	1
13/10/38	I-16	2
3/11/38	I-16	3
16/11/38	SB-2	4
30/12/38	I-16	5
22/1/39	I-15	6 (unconfirmed)

World War 2:

With I./ZG 76 in 1940

With I./ZG 26 in 1941/42

Later with II./ZG 76 and JG 300 in *Reichsverteidigung*

Knight's Cross – 9 June 1944

Final rank – Hauptmann

Total – 22 victories (including 10 four-engined bombers), plus Spain

Georg Braunshirn, 2.J/88**Spain:**

23/7/38	I-16	1 (unconfirmed)
23/9/38	SB-2	2
31/10/38	I-15	3
3/11/38	I-15	4
6/11/38	I-15	5

World War 2:

Flew with 1. and possibly 8./JG 54. Believed to have claimed 13 victories on Eastern Front in summer 1941

Killed in Action flying a Bf 109 on 16 August 1941 in the East

Final rank – Oberfeldwebel

Gotthard Handrick, Stab J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords****Spain:**

9/9/37	I-15	1 (unconfirmed)
18/5/38	I-16	2

Believed to have scored three further victories

World War 2:

Kmdr I./JG 26 – 13 July 1938

Kdre JG 26 – 24 June 1940

Transferred June 1940 to head Luftwaffe mission in Rumania

End of war, commander of 8. *Jagddivision*

Final rank – Oberst

Otto Heinrich von Houwald, J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords****Spain:**

5/9/36	Ni-H.52C.1	1
5/9/36	Casa-Breguet 19	2
26/9/36	Casa-Vickers Vildebeest	3
19/10/36	Ni-H.52C.1	4
4/1/37	I-16	5

World War 2:

Kmdr I./JG 3 – 1 July 1938

Kdre JFS 1 Werneuchen – 21 August 1940

Killed in Action – 24 July 1941

Wolfgang Lippert, 3.J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords****Spain:**

15/7/38	I-15	1
23/7/38	I-16	2
14/8/38	I-16	3
4/10/38	I-16	4
29/12/38	I-15	5

World War 2:

StKp 3./JG 53 – 1 May 1939

Kmdr II./JG 27 – 3 September 1940

Knight's Cross – 24 September 1940 (12 victories)

Shot down in combat on 23 November 1941 and captured with severe injuries. Died in British captivity after leg amputations on 3 December 1941

Final rank – Hauptmann

Total – 25 victories, plus Spain

Günther Lützow, 2.J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds****Spain:**

6/4/37	I-15	1
22/5/37	I-15	2
28/5/37	I-15	3
18/8/37	I-15	4
22/8/37	I-16	5

World War 2:

At outbreak of war assigned to JFS 1 Werneuchen

Kmdr I./JG 3 – 3 November 1939

Kdre JG 3 – 21 August 1940

Knight's Cross – 18 September 1940 (15 victories)

Oakleaves – 20 July 1941 (42 victories)

Swords – 11 October 1941 (92 victories)

Transferred to *Stab General der Jagdflieger* – 11 August 1942

Commander 1. *Jagddivision* – November 1943

Commander 4. *Fliegerschuldivision* – 1945

Jafü Oberitalien – 1945

Missing, presumed killed in action flying Me 262 with JV 44 on 24/4/45

Final rank – Oberst

Total – 105 victories, plus Spain

Joachim Schlichting, 2.J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds****Spain:**

23/9/37	I-16	1
29/11/37	I-16	2
7/2/38	I-16	3
21/2/38	I-16	4
10/3/38	I-16	5

World War 2:

At outbreak of war, StKp 2./LG 2

Kmdr III./JG 27 – 13 February 1940

Shot down by Spitfires over England on 6 September 1940. Seriously wounded and taken PoW

Knight's Cross – 14 December 1940.

Final rank – Hauptmann

Total – Three victories, plus Spain

Willy Szuggar, 1.J/88**Spain:**

14/8/38	I-16	1
14/8/38	I-16	2
4/10/38	I-15	3
12/11/38	I-16	4
3/1/39	I-15	5 (unconfirmed)

Hannes Trautloft, J/88**Spanish Cross in Gold with Crossed Swords****Spain:**

25/8/36	Casa-Breguet 19	1
30/8/36	Potez 540	2
1/9/36	Ni-H.52C.1	3
30/9/36	Potez 540	4
8/12/36	I-16	5

World War 2:

StKp 2./JG 77 – 1 July 1938

Kmdr I./JG 20 to III./JG 51 – 1939 to August 1940

Kdre JG 54 – 25 August 1940

Knight's Cross – 27 July 1941 (20 victories)

Inspizient Ost, Stab General der Jagdflieger – 6 July 1943

Commander 4. *Fliegerschuldivision* – 1944

Final rank – Oberst

Total – 53 victories, plus Spain

COLOUR PLATES**1****He 51B-1 2-4 of Oberleutnant Hannes Trautloft, J/88, Tablada and Escalona del Prado, August 1936**

Hannes Trautloft was at the controls of this aircraft when he was shot down on 30 August 1936 over the Sierra Guadarrama. It is finished in the early standard scheme

of RLM 63 (Hellgrau), to which the Nationalist black disc identification symbol has been applied, with code numbers also in black and a diagonal black Nationalist cross on white on the rudder. Why 'E 2' has also been painted onto the rudder remains a mystery, although the '2' could be an early form of aircraft type identification number – '2' was the

number allocated to the He 51 by the Nationalists. The drop tank was left in bare metal.

2

He 112 V7 5-1 of Oberleutnant Günther Radusch, Versuchsjagdgruppe 88, Tablada, and Unteroffizier Max Schulz and Oberleutnant Wilhelm Balthasar, 1. and 2.J/88, 1936-37

Accounts conflict as to whether this aircraft was the He 112 V3, V4 or V5. The fighter is seen here in bare metal as delivered to Spain, with replacement panels, some of which may have even been finished in RLM 63. The aircraft's type number was '5', which was applied to the fuselage ahead of the black Nationalist disc in the usual manner. This machine was given a splinter camouflage pattern when it was assigned to 1.J/88 as a ground-attack aircraft, in which role it crash-landed and suffered a broken fuselage on 19 July 1937.

3

He 51B-1 2-23 of Oberleutnant Hannes Trautloft and Leutnant Dietrich von Bothmer, 2.J/88, Tablada and Ávila, autumn 1936

Believed to have been flown by both Trautloft and von Bothmer, this He 51 was finished in an overall standard coat of RLM 63 and carried standard *Legion Condor* markings. It was also adorned with the 'Zylinderhut' emblem of 2.J/88 in what would become the marking's customary position on both He 51s and Bf 109s. The diagonal black rudder cross varied in style on some aircraft in that it did not cover the entire rudder. Again, the fighter's drop tank was left in bare metal.

4

He 51B-1 108 of J/88, Northern Front, early 1937

Depicted here possibly as seen at Vitoria, this aircraft showed signs of heavy wear to its pale green finish following many months of combat. The overall finish could have borne a similarity to RLM 70 (Schwarzgrün), but it is more likely to have been a locally supplied and applied paint. The owner and meaning of the bird and chain emblem within the black Nationalist fuselage disc is not known, but this could imply a reference to the Spanish nickname of 'Cadenas' (chains). The latter referred to the He 51s' ceaseless, revolving ground-attack operations. It is believed that this aircraft was handed over to the Nationalist air force at some point by the *Legion Condor*. The drop tank was left in bare metal.

5

He 51B-1 2-64 of Oberleutnant Harro Harder, Staffelkapitän 1.J/88, Vitoria, spring-summer 1937

The aircraft was finished in a mottle of RLM 61 (Dunkelbraun) and RLM 62 (Grün) over RLM 63, a style adopted increasingly as He 51s were deployed on more regular ground-attack missions. Undersides were RLM 65 (Hellblau). The 1. *Staffel* emblem (a cartoon of a diving Marabou) was applied beneath and forward of the cockpit door, and Harder's personal emblem of a white Hakenkreuz overlay the black Nationalist fuselage disc. This aircraft may have been taken over by Oberleutnant Eberhard d'Elsa at Calamocha in January 1938.

6

Bf 109B-1 6-4 of VJ/88 and Leutnant Kurt von Gilsa and Unteroffizier Guido Höness, 2.J/88, Northern Front, summer 1937

This early Bf 109 had been given a coat of RLM 62 (Grün) with undersides of RLM 65 (Hellblau). After being handed over to 2. *Staffel* from the *Versuchsjagdstaffel*, it was decorated with the 'Zylinderhut' emblem of 2.J/88. Standard *Legion Condor*/Nationalist fuselage, wing and rudder markings were applied, but the fuselage code was in the early style, with all numbers aft of the black fuselage recognition disc. The aircraft was taken on strength in March 1937 but withdrawn from service at the end of that year.

7

He 51B-1 2-85 possibly of Leutnant Eduard Neumann, 3.J/88, Northern Front, late 1937

Details of who flew this aircraft operationally are unclear, although it is possible Eduard Neumann may have used it towards the end of 1937. Neumann's namesake, *Stabsarzt* Dr Heinrich Neumann of San/88 (the *Legion Condor*'s medical battalion) was an amateur pilot and is known to have flown the fighter on 5 December 1937 when he crash-landed it while attempting to land at El Burgo. Dr Neumann had a practice of unofficially 'borrowing' aircraft, or using captured Republican machines to visit crews and patients at airfields and locations across Spain. Its camouflage scheme was formed of patches of RLM 61 (Dunkelbraun) and RLM 62 (Grün) over RLM 63, as found on several He 51s used for ground-attack work. Undersides were RLM 65 (Hellblau), with white wingtips on the wing undersides, while the wing uppersurfaces featured white tips and two black recognition discs at each end, as well as a white cross running from leading to trailing edge. Two more, separate, white stripes were applied in a similar manner to the centre section of the upper wing. The black Nationalist recognition disc on the fuselage had been overpainted in white (probably viewed as highly irregular) and outlined in black. An unidentified heraldic emblem on a shield was also applied to the nose directly above the spinner – possibly the coat of arms of the regular pilot's home town. The drop tank was left in bare metal.

8

Bf 109B-1 6-15 of Unteroffizier Otto Polenz, 1.J/88, Aragón Front, December 1937

Finished in overall RLM 62 on fuselage and uppersurfaces, with undersides in RLM 65, this machine also had white wingtips and black recognition discs, onto which white crosses had been applied. The black fuselage recognition disc was marked with the diagonal white cross of 1.J/88, this particular marking being used between April 1937 and September 1938. This aircraft came down virtually intact in enemy territory at Corta Azaila-Escatron on 4 December 1937 while being flown by Polenz. It was quickly crated up and sent to the Soviet Union for evaluation.

9

He 51B-1 2-123 of 4.J/88, Aragón, late 1937/early 1938

A typical example from the last batch of He 51s to be delivered to Spain, 2-123 was on the strength of Oberleutnant Eberhard d'Elsa's 4.J/88 and carried that *Staffel*'s 'Pik-As' (Ace of Spades) emblem over the black Nationalist fuselage recognition

disc. The aircraft was finished in a base coat of RLM 63 (Hellgrau) with overlying patches of what was most probably RLM 70 (Schwarzgrün). The spinner was white and the undersides were RLM 65 (Hellblau), with white wingtips on both wing undersides.

10

He 51B-1 2-86 of Unteroffizier Erich Kuhlmann, 4.J/88, Calamocha, January 1938

This Heinkel featured patches of a dark green – possibly RLM 71 if it was a German paint – over RLM 63. The undersides were RLM 65, probably with white wingtips on both wing undersides. It is possible that this aircraft may have originally been on the strength of 1. *Staffel*, as it boasts a diving Marabou emblem directly below the cockpit door, which has been prefixed with the name *Heidy*.

11

He 51B-1 2-78 of Oberleutnant Adolf Galland, Staffelfkapitän 3.J/88, Zaragoza, spring 1938

Galland's He 51 featured a base colour of RLM 71 (Dunkelgrün) with darker patches of RLM 70 (Schwarzgrün) applied over it, while the undersides were coated in RLM 65 (Hellblau). Galland's 'adopted' *Mickey Mouse* emblem, also used by his *Staffel*, was, as with the aircraft of 1. *Staffel*, applied to the area just beneath and forward of the cockpit door. A further marking, a Maltese-style cross, was painted over the black Nationalist fuselage recognition disc that was in turn outlined in white. Because of the fighter's relatively dark finish, its black fuselage numbers were somewhat indistinct. The drop tank was left in bare metal.

12

He 112 V9 8-2 of Oberleutnant Harro Harder, 1.J/88, possibly Tablada, April 1938

Believed to have been finished in RLM 63 overall, He 112 V9 was flown by Harro Harder in operational trials. It carried the unusual type identification number '8' as opposed to the He 112 prototype coded 5-1 and the 16 pre-production aircraft used by the Nationalist air arm which all used the number '5'. The aircraft bore Harder's individual emblem of a white Hakenkreuz within the black fuselage disc, this marking also having been applied to the ace's He 51 during his first tour of duty in Spain.

13

Bf 109D-1 6-51 of Oberleutnant Wolfgang Schellmann, Staffelfkapitän 1.J/88, possibly Calamocha, June 1938

6-51 was the first Bf 109D-1 to be delivered to Spain, the aircraft being the count of 12-victory *experte*, Wolfgang Schellmann. The style of code numerals on this aircraft was different to many preceding machines, and the fighter's diagonal recognition cross on the rudder also featured much thicker black lines than usual. The black fuselage recognition disc is marked with the diagonal white cross of 1.J/88 and the aircraft has a white spinner. The rudder is marked with four victory bars, the last representing Schellmann's victory over an I-16 on 13 June 1938.

14

Bf 109D-1 6-75 of Leutnant Rudolf Goy, 3.J/88, La Sénia, September 1938

Finished in overall RLM 62 on its fuselage and uppersurfaces,

with undersides in RLM 65 and white wingtips and black recognition discs with white crosses, Goy's aircraft bore a personal emblem of a stylised bird within the Nationalist fuselage marking. Although the origins of this emblem are not known, it is possible that it may have been inspired by a German gliding club or sailplane fraternity with which Goy had some association.

15

Bf 109D-1 6-56 of Hauptmann Gotthardt Handrick, Kommandeur Stab J/88, La Sénia, September 1938

Finished in overall RLM 62 on its fuselage and uppersurfaces, with undersides in RLM 65, white wingtips and black recognition discs with white crosses, Handrick's aircraft featured a white spinner with two red rings at the tip. Behind the latter were five Olympic rings and his Gold Medal winning year of 1936, while the other side contained another set of rings displaying the year 1940? (in the hope of a second Gold Medal in the planned Tokyo games). The aircraft also had the 'Zylinderhut' emblem on its fuselage and a personal marking of a stylised Gothic 'h' applied within the black fuselage recognition disc. The tail fin was decorated with two victory bars representing Handrick's claims on 9 September 1937 (I-15 unconfirmed) and 18 May 1938 (I-16).

16

Bf 109D-1 6-56 of Hauptmann Walter Grabmann, Kommandeur Stab J/88, La Sénia, September 1938

When he assumed command of J/88 from Handrick on 10 September 1938, Walter Grabmann retained his predecessor's Bf 109, as well as its Olympic ring spinner markings. However, he did overpaint Handrick's stylised Gothic 'h' with a simple 'G' in the black fuselage recognition disc and added his own victories to Handrick's rudder markings. The artwork shown here depicts Grabmann's aircraft following his third victory (of an eventual six), which he scored over an I-16 on 23 September 1938.

17

Bf 109D-1 6-79 of Hauptmann Werner Mölders, Staffelfkapitän 3.J/88, possibly La Sénia, November 1938

Mölders' Bf 109 was finished in overall RLM 62 on its fuselage and uppersurfaces, with undersides in RLM 65, white wingtips and black recognition discs with white crosses. It bore the name *Luchs* (Lynx) on both sides of the engine cowling, with a variation of the *Mickey Mouse* emblem of 3.J/88 on the port side. The rudder shows 15 white victory bars (as seen in photographs of this aircraft taken in late 1938), although it is widely accepted that Mölders claimed only 14 victories in Spain. Thus the rudder count remains something of a mystery, Mölders perhaps considering that one of his victories had not been recognised, or had one of his mechanics simply anticipated another kill?

18

Bf 109E-1 6-100 of J/88, La Sénia, late 1938

The first three-digit coded Bf 109 to operate in Spain was yellow-spinnered E-1 whose assigned *Staffel* remains unknown. The aircraft also had an area of black paint running

from the engine exhaust across the wing root to the wing trailing edge and beyond, intended to conceal smoke blackening from the Daimler-Benz DB 601 engine. Otherwise, the fighter featured a standard finish of overall RLM 62 on its fuselage and upper surfaces, with undersides in RLM 65, white wingtips and black recognition discs with white crosses.

19

Bf 109E-3 6-107 of 2.J/88, Catalonia front, early 1939

All Nationalist aircraft in Spain had the revised style of coding, with the numbers applied either side of the black fuselage recognition disc rather than aft of it, from 1937 onward. The motto *“Mors-Mors!”* has been applied to the engine cowling – a very old slang expression used by Hamburg water sellers! This titling is also believed to have featured on a number of other Bf 109s in Spain.

20

Bf 109E-3 6-119 of Hauptmann Siebelt Reents, Staffelpatän 1.J/88, León, spring 1939

Finished in overall RLM 62 on its fuselage and upper surfaces, with undersides in RLM 65, white wingtips and black recognition discs with white crosses, this aircraft carries the large *Holzauge* ('Wooden Eye') emblem of 1.J/88 beneath its cockpit. This marking was a reference to the Spanish gesture of pulling down the bottom eyelid with one finger to indicate the need for caution.

21

Bf 109E-3 6-121 of Oberleutnant Karl-Wolfgang Redlich, 2.J/88, León, March 1939

A very standard-looking machine of 2.J/88 finished in overall RLM 62 on fuselage and upper surfaces, with undersides in RLM 65, white wingtips and black recognition discs with white crosses. Redlich would leave Spain with claims for four victories, three of which were unconfirmed. He would

receive the Knight's Cross in 1941, go on to command I./JG 27 and achieve 43 victories prior to his death in May 1944.

22

Bf 109E-3 6-123 of Oberleutnant Hans Schmoller-Haldy, 3.J/88, March 1939

The oft-photographed Bf 109E-3 of Schmoller-Haldy was finished in overall RLM 62 on its fuselage and upper surfaces, with undersides in RLM 65, white wingtips and black recognition discs with white crosses and a spinner painted yellow. Additionally, the aircraft carried the pilot's personal emblem of an over-flowing beer Stein with the initials *CP* on it, denoting Schmoller-Haldy's membership of the 'Cardinal Pfaf' drinking club. Finally, the fighter was also adorned with a variation of 3. *Staffel's* Mickey Mouse emblem.

23

Bf 109E-3 6-126 of J/88, El Prat de Llobregat, Barcelona, spring 1939

Featuring a standard finish of overall RLM 62 on its fuselage and upper surfaces, with undersides in RLM 65, white wingtips and black recognition discs with white crosses, this white-spinnered machine was one of several Bf 109s handed over to the new Spanish Air Force once the Civil War had come to an end.

24

Bf 109E-3 6-130 of Hauptmann Walter Grabmann, Kommandeur Stab J/88, possibly El Prat de Llobregat, Barcelona, March 1939

The penultimate Bf 109 to be sent to Spain, this E-3 is thought to have been used on occasion by the last *Kommandeur* of J/88, Hauptmann Walter Grabmann. It is a very standard machine, with no known personal markings. Finished in overall RLM 62 on its fuselage and upper surfaces, with undersides in RLM 65, white wingtips and black recognition discs with white crosses, the aircraft also boasted a white spinner.

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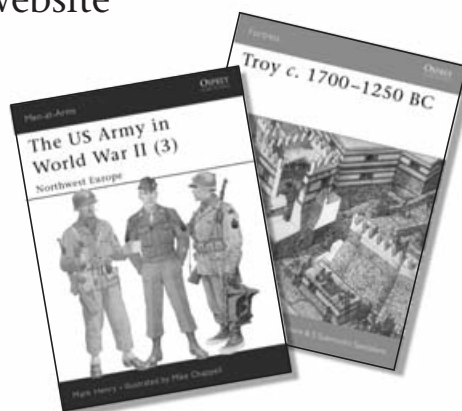
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Front Cover

Mark Postlethwaite's specially commissioned cover artwork captures the moment that Leutnant Rudolf Goy of the 3. *Staffel* of the *Legion Condor's Jagdgruppe* 88 banks his Bf 109D, coded 6-75, over a Republican air force I-16 *Rata* which he has just shot down following an engagement between Segorbe and Viver, just east of Valencia, in southeastern Spain, on 19 July 1938.

Goy's Bf 109 was one of a group of eight aircraft led by Oberleutnant Werner Mölders, the highest-scoring fighter ace in the *Legion Condor*. The German formation comprised four separate *Rotten* of two aircraft each – a tactical innovation devised by Mölders that offered German fighter pilots in Spain a looser and more flexible system in preference to the more rigid wing-to-wing 'V' formation previously adopted. In the *Rotte*, the leader could concentrate on scanning the sky for the enemy, while the wingman would cover the vulnerable rear. Furthermore, such a formation reduced the risk of collision and allowed greater manoeuvrability and higher speeds. Several four-aircraft *Schwarme* could operate together in *Staffel*-strength, staggered at different altitudes so that there was an even greater element of mutual search and protection, as well as flexibility, when engaging the opposition.

Mölders' and Goy's formation had been despatched from La Senia airfield as escort to bombers of the *Legion Condor* when it encountered three *escuadrilla* of I-16s during the Nationalist offensive towards the Mediterranean. Mölders scored his third victory west of Villar del Arzobispo, and four other pilots, including Goy, accounted for an I-16 each.

Rudolf Goy claimed three victories in Spain and went on to fly with II./JG 53 during World War 2.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to Ted Oliver, with all my thanks for his extraordinary assistance over the years.

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